Sight&Sound

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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

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PLUS

MARTHA MARCY MAY MARLENE
Sean Durkin on his cult-escape chiller

MULHOLLAND DR.
is it Lynch's greatest?

DAVID HOCKNEY
the return of 'A Bigger Splash'

REPO MAN
the origins of the 80s punk classic

GENE TIERNEY
the face of 40s Hollywood

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CRONENBERG

ON JUNG AND FREUD AND SEX AND HYSTERIA

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Wojciech J. Has

The Hourglass Sanatorium: Restored Edition

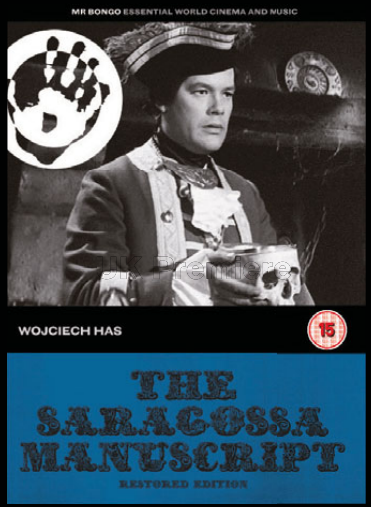
Has fashions a cinematic universe composed with byzantine sets, hallucinatory images and agallery of grotesque characters. However his magical-realist vision of pre-WW2 Poland is tinged with the sober consciousness of the violence that would follow and the recreation of Joseph's childhood in a Jewish ghetto, foreshadowing the Holocaust.

"The Hourglass is a mind-blowing work, the cinematographic equivalent of all Mahler's symphonies put together"

International Film Guide

Wojciech J. Has

The Saragossa Manuscript: Restored Edition



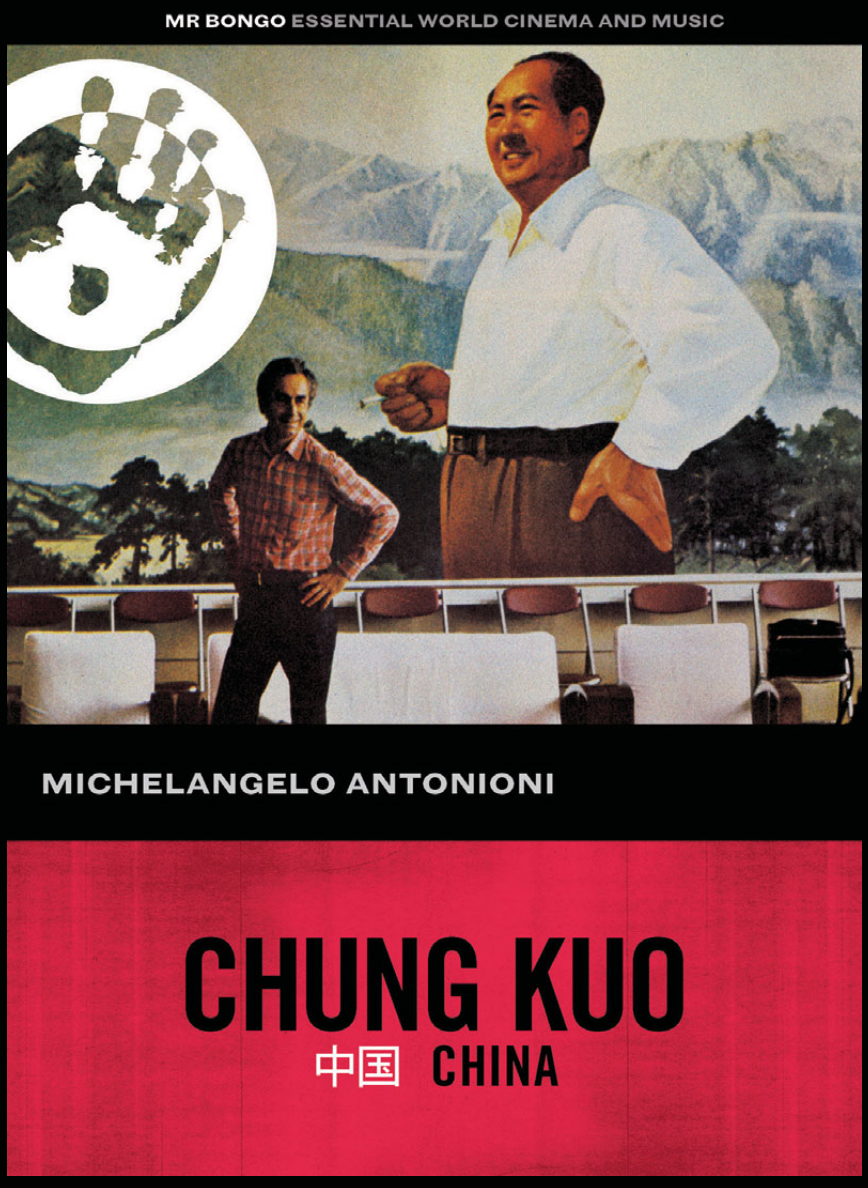
Adapted from explorer Jan Potocki's magnum opus, Wojciech J. Has' The Saragossa Manuscript is a major cult film of the 1960s. Its admirers include film-makers Luis Buñuel and David Lynch as well as musician Jerry Garcia of The Grateful Dead.

"I love the Saragossa Manuscript... exceptional"

Luis Buñuel

Michelangelo Antonioni

Chung Kuo China



One of Antonioni's most innovative works, formerly languishing as a prized object in cinema archives, Chung Kuo China's vision achieves greater resonance in the 21st Century than the time of its release.

Despite receiving the direct support of the Chinese Communist Party during production, Chung Kuo China provoked a strong backlash on its initial release, earning rebuke from Mao Zedong himself.

Among Antonioni's finest documentary achievements **A History of Narative Film**

Pioneering three-part documentary on China **New York Times**

A work that manifested, from the start, an attitude of warm and cordial participation in the great event of the Chinese people **Umberto Echo**

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COVER

David Cronenberg photographed by Nicolas Guerin/Getty Contour

Next issue on sale 6 March

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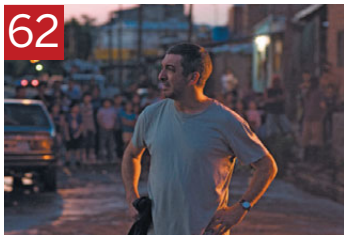

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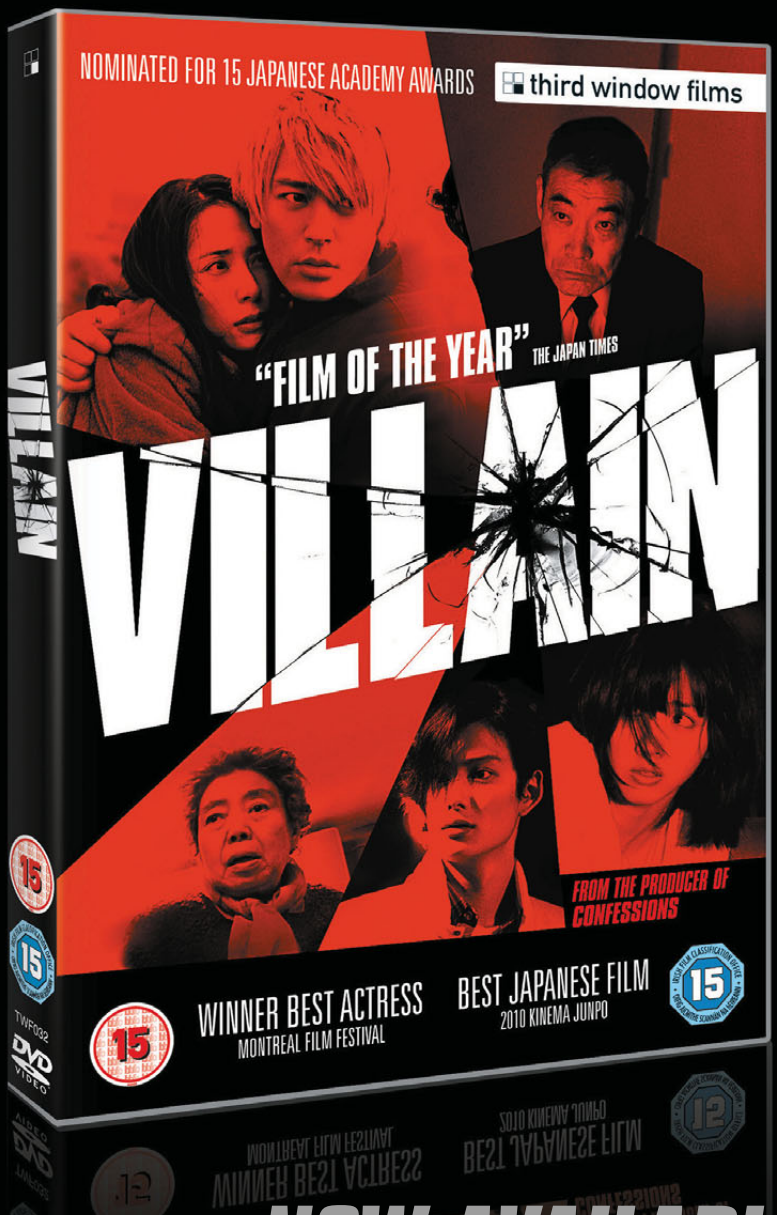

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NICK JAMES

GET INTO BED

International readers must forgive me this month as I turn to 'A Future for British Film', the report of Lord Smith's Film Policy Review Panel, and its main question: "How do we secure greater consistency in the quality and success of British film?" This eagerly awaited document was designed partly to allow the British industry to tell the government – which scrapped the UK Film Council – what the BFI – which absorbed the rump of that organisation, including the management of lottery finance – should do in future. And it's an enhanced future in which lottery monies for film return to an annual £40 million once the 2012 Olympics are over.

But the document's first impact was through headline grabbing. A pre-publication leak to the BBC's Will Gompertz claimed the report would mean "it's over for Mike Leigh". This proved to be nonsense. The prime minister's statement that "our role, and that of the British Film Institute, should be to support the sector in becoming even more dynamic and entrepreneurial, helping UK producers to make commercially successful pictures" was also misleading. The report does not single out "commercially successful" films. It suggests that "filmmakers need to think from the outset about the audience", and has ideas about how better connections with audiences might be achieved. Nowhere does it prescribe the kind of films the BFI Production Fund should invest in.

That's perhaps why peace broke out as soon as Cameron had had his say. What the panel's 56 recommendations amount to is a wish-list of incremental changes to boost UK film culture and forge better alliances across the whole film sector – albeit so many changes that three times £40 million might not be enough to implement them. Pleasingly, the report has none of the hubristic bombast that so marred 'A Bigger Picture', the document that launched the Film Council in 2000. There's even an admission of the failure of the FC's overweening ambitions: "The strategic goal of more sustained growth across the sector has not yet been achieved."

The main concerns form a familiar catalogue. The industry and the BFI need to do better at informing audiences through education, joined-up digital dissemination and better marketing. The concerns of the UK-wide audience should be much better represented. Stronger anti-piracy action and better control of copyright is urged. Rethinks of the Virtual Print Fee and the feature release window are needed to aid the success of UK indie films. More joined-up thinking and funding between producers and distributors are required, plus better rewards for filmmakers in return for bigger risk investment. And, in its bravest move, the panel thinks the UK broadcasters should do much more for UK film.

The more alarming aspects headlined seem, on further examination, to be anodyne. Take, for instance, the "developing and launching [of] a British film 'brand'". Thoughts of red-carpet guests waving Union Jacks and doing the Lambeth walk every time a British film came out receded when it was understood that what this meant was an annual 'British Film Week'. That idea was tried in the 1990s, but no doubt it might be done more effectively. Audience testing is another bugbear, but the recommendation is not for its mandatory application. "Market testing certain types of film... is commonplace," it says. "Small enhancements or adjustments to the final edit can make differences to the success of a film... Test screenings can also help identify the best marketing strategies."

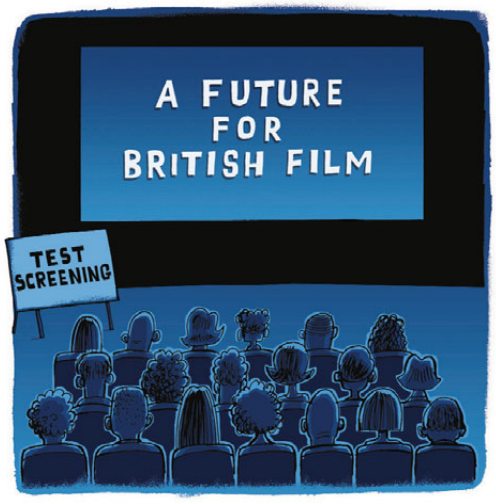
However, there is an underlying tone of anxiety throughout the document – understandable when you consider the difficult future the industry faces as DVD sales decline and streaming revenues prove too slow to replace them. So keen is the report to tell us that "there are films for which cinema may not be the right medium and which will never get access to screens" that it does so twice.

Film production is what interests most people. The argument here is that "many problems of independent UK film stem from the misalignment of interests between production and distribution." The changes designed to bring those two sectors together are too technical to explain here, but the main one is for producer-distributor partnerships to access Joint Venture Funding. The rationale runs as follows: "For many producers, the distribution business can appear to be characterised by complex revenue structures that seem to capture the majority of the benefits of success; in the eyes of many distributors some producers appear disconnected from the marketplace, and fail to understand the dynamics of distribution and the risk/reward equation underpinning commercial decisions." If I were a producer I might find the wording of this a trifle patronising, but you catch the drift: if you want to get ahead, get into bed.

That none of the filmmaker lobby groups – WGGB (writers), D-UK (directors) and PACT (producers) – got everything they wanted, and that they've all been encouraged to band together in their mutual interest, are good outcomes. "The fear that new distribution technologies will cannibalise established revenue streams has inhibited change," says the panel, and "conservatism" was listed as "the main obstacle to change."

Conservatism with a small 'c', of course.

The report does not single out "commercially successful" films. It suggests that "film-makers need to think from the outset about the audience"



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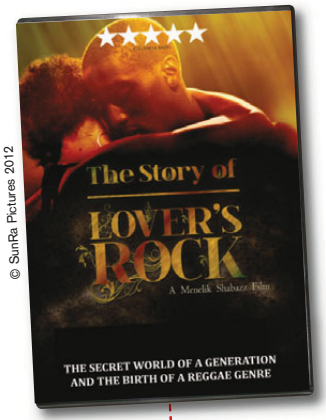

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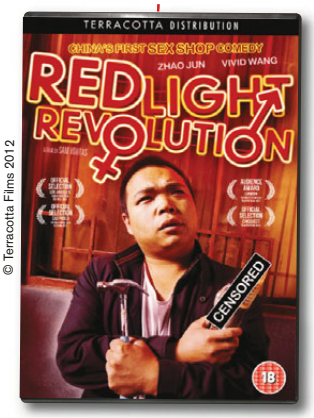

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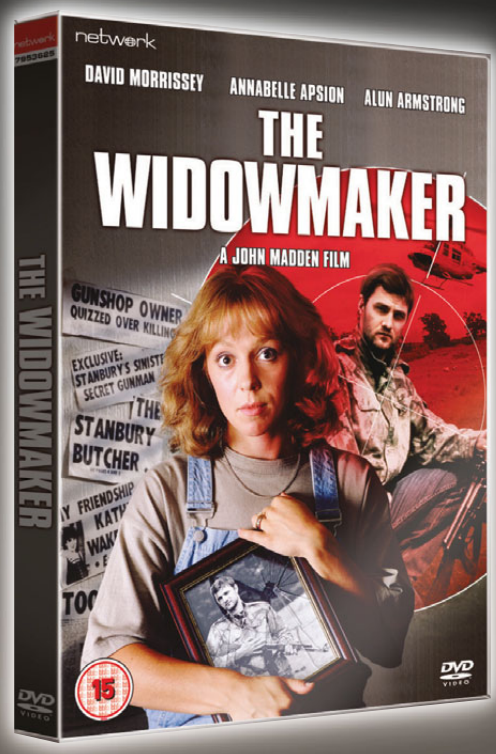

THE WIDOWMAKER

A FILM BY OSCAR-WINNER JOHN MADDEN (*THE DEBT, SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE, PRIME SUSPECT*)

Annabelle Apsion (*Shameless*), Alun Armstrong (*New Tricks*, *The Mummy Returns*) and David Morrissey (*Red Riding*, *State of Play*) star in this disturbing, compelling drama which tells the story of a woman coming to terms with the trauma of being married to a mass-murderer.

Drawing on a remarkable pool of talent that includes Ted Childs – executive producer of *Inspector Morse* and *Lewis* – and multi-award-winning screenwriter Jeremy Brock (*The Last King of Scotland*), *The Widowmaker* earned a BAFTA nomination for Best Single Drama in 1991.

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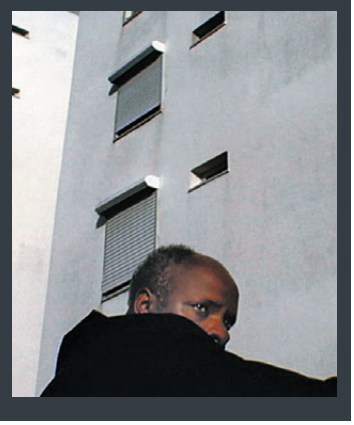
THE BIGGER PICTURE

Slowly, surely

The term 'Slow Cinema' first appeared in the pages of S&S in February 2010, used by Jonathan Romney in a piece considering the "varied strain of austere minimalist cinema" that had thrived in the first decade of the new century – films by the likes of Lisandro Alonso, Béla Tarr and Carlos Reygadas. The term sparked much feedback, some readers finding it useful, others feeling it was reductive to bracket such a range of filmmakers under one banner. The AV Festival's 'As Slow As Possible' programme, which runs in cities across the north of England from 1 to 31 March, reopens the debate. It gathers a fascinating range of films, music and events that all probe questions of time and duration in art. Alongside films including Rirkrit Tiravanija's 'Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbours' (above) and Pedro Costa's 'Colossal Youth' (right), there's a debate on the notion of 'Slow Cinema', with a panel including Lav Diaz, Fred Kelemen, Ben Rivers and Jonathan Romney, among others.



INTERVIEW

Fifth amendments

Pawel Pawlikowski talks to **Michael Brooke** *about his new film 'The Woman in the Fifth'*

The gap between Pawel Pawlikowski's third and fourth features has lasted seven years, but somehow it feels shorter. Although his new film *The Woman in the Fifth* – based on a Douglas Kennedy thriller crammed with narrative twists and Stephen King-like supernatural contrivances – is outwardly a very different proposition from *My Summer of Love* (2004), *Last Resort* (2000) and his acclaimed BBC documentaries, Pawlikowski's elliptical worldview is so distinctive that the new film immediately brings memories of his earlier work flooding back.

As on his previous features, Pawlikowski wrote the script too, making significant changes to the source material. "The novel spends a lot of time explaining itself, whereas the film does the opposite – it elides every possible thing," he says. "With my director of photography [regular collaborator Ryszard Lenczewski] and the actors, we'd just try and shape it more musically than in a literary way. At times when I directed actors, I'd use musical analogies – 'Do it like a mazurka. Do a little turn and step to the left, step to the right and then you exit' – rather than worrying about the exact wording of the text."

Despite starring Ethan Hawke and Kristin Scott Thomas, and being based on an English-language source, 51 per cent of the film is in French, according to Pawlikowski – although ironically the famously bilingual Scott Thomas only speaks English, one of many unsettling games played with audience expectations. "It's not a thriller," the director explains. "It's a thing with a logic of its own. A bit of an experiment. A dangerous game, maybe, because if you don't provide clear genre handles, you can lose half the audience. Still, I wasn't doing it for the sake of experiment – I wanted to tell a moving, tragic and disturbing story from inside the head of the hero. But you have to watch and listen to it properly, without second-guessing and speculating. It's not a generically constructed piece building to a denouement."

Hawke plays American novelist Tom Ricks, visiting Paris to try to patch up relations with his estranged French wife following an unspecified and possibly violent rupture. Almost every frame depicts Ricks or what he sees, but he's a less than trustworthy guide. "That sort of thing happens in literature quite often, with an unreliable first-person narrator," says Pawlikowski. "Between the lines you understand that he's off his head or has complete delusions about reality. In film it's more difficult to pull off. It is an objective medium, with bodies in space and elements of photographed reality, so you immediately assume that it's for real."

'Once I put these thick glasses on Ethan's nose, it gave us licence to not show everything – to limit his field of vision'

Pawlikowski's treatment of Paris recalls the way he turned Margate into an off-kilter no man's land in *Last Resort*. "With my production designer, we took a Vespa and spent two months criss-crossing Paris looking for things that would feel a bit strange, dreamlike, maybe a little Eastern European," he says. "Of course, most producers dream of a film set in Paris, with Paris in the title, and flaunting Paris as the main attraction, so we did a horrible thing!" He includes the Eiffel Tower, but framed so that it's "a monstrous elephant's leg".

Ricks wears glasses, and much of the film is shot as if from his myopic point of view. "I was looking for all sorts of ways of estranging Paris so it wouldn't be the lively, reassuring Paris that we know and like," Pawlikowski explains. "Once I decided to put these thick glasses on Ethan's nose, it gave us a licence to not show everything precisely – to limit his field and depth of vision. A bit like Joseph K, he picks out and focuses on one thing and doesn't notice the bigger picture."

A dangerous game: Pawel Pawlikowski

The film runs just 85 minutes, brevity being another Pawlikowski characteristic. "I like my stories to be relatively simple," he says. "Most of my stories involve three characters in a landscape, and then I kind of just distil things to expressive elements and shuffle them around until I get the thing into the right shape. So it's a slightly different procedure from normal storytelling, I suppose. The main thing is that you leave the cinema with the film still in your head, not like you've overeaten and want to move on."

Part of the time since Pawlikowski's last feature *My Summer of Love* was spent filming an adaptation of Magnus Mills's novel *The Restraint of Beasts*, but the project had to be abandoned half-completed following a family tragedy. "I'm still hoping someone will buy up the rushes from the insurers and we can finish it with some ploy whereby the characters meet ten years later – which is not impossible in that story, by the way," Pawlikowski says. "Mike Leigh once said to me that you've got to keep making films all the time, otherwise you don't exist – you disappear from the audience's mind. It's been a difficult choice, but my kids are more important to me than films." Which is what *The Woman in the Fifth* is ultimately about.

■ *'The Woman in the Fifth' is released on 17 February, and is reviewed on p.79*

IN PRODUCTION

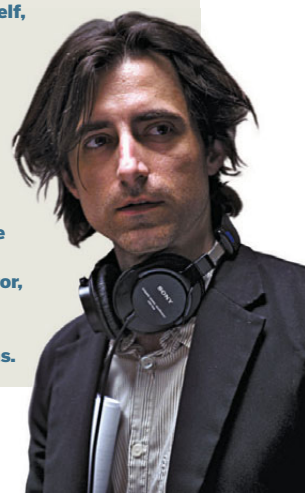
● **Sally Potter** has been awarded £1 million in lottery funding by the BFI for her next feature 'Bomb', starring Annette Bening, Elle Fanning, Christina Hendricks and Alessandro Nivola. The film is reportedly a coming-of-age drama set against the protests of the 1960s, about two teens whose friendship suffers after one of them has an affair with the other's father.

● **Shane Meadows** is currently filming the regrouped 'Madchester' band The Stone Roses in rehearsal for their live festival dates this summer, with a view to releasing a documentary charting the band's return. The band are also the subject of Mat Whitecross's 'Spike Island', a drama about an indie band travelling across the UK to see the Roses at their famed gig at the island in 1990.

● **Vincent Gallo** – fresh from starring as Kaspar Hauser in David Manuli's 'post-modern western' update of the story, which opens at this year's Rotterdam festival – is to star in Alexandre Nahon's adaptation of David Goodis's novel 'Down There', previously the source for Truffaut's 'Shoot the Pianist'.

● **Biyi Bandele**, the Nigerian playwright acclaimed for his stage adaptation of Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart', is making his film-directorial debut with an adaptation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's bestselling novel 'Half of a Yellow Sun', set during the Nigerian-Biafran war. Chiwetel Ejiofor, Dominic Cooper and Thandie Newton are all attached to star. Funding has come from Nigerian private equity and the BFI.

● **Noah Baumbach** (pictured below) seems to have decided that the 'Great American Novel' needs the 'Great American HBO series' treatment: he's set to direct a pilot episode based on Jonathan Franzen's award-winning 2001 novel 'The Corrections'. The pilot has been co-written by Baumbach and Franzen himself, who has also reportedly written the following ten episodes, should HBO give the series the go-ahead. The cast includes Ewan McGregor, Chris Cooper, Dianne Wiest and Rhys Ifans.



REVIVAL

The first Indian superstar

Naman Ramchandran
welcomes a season devoted to 'Showman' Raj Kapoor

An older generation of Russian film enthusiasts have fond memories of Raj Kapoor's *The Vagabond* (*Awaara*, 1951) and are prone to greeting Indian tourists by humming the opening bars of the film's immensely popular title song 'Awaara hoon' – a tune revered by many, including Yuri Gagarin and Mao Tse-Tung. Some 63 million Russians saw the film when it was released in the Soviet Union.

Though Indian films were exhibited intermittently in London from 1933, it was the release of *The Vagabond* in the USSR, China and Turkey that created popular Hindi cinema's first true star international export in Kapoor – a precursor to the immense popularity enjoyed around the world by Bollywood stars today. The son of popular stage and film actor Prithviraj Kapoor, Raj turned to acting at an early age. He debuted as a child actor, aged 11, in Debaki Bose's *Inquilab* (1935) and duly made his debut as a leading man in Kidar Sharma's *Neel Kamal* (1947).

The next year, aged 24, he debuted as director with *Fire* (*Aag*), a film notable for his onscreen pairing with the actress Nargis, with whom he would act in several successful films. As a filmmaker, Kapoor's work displays a variety of influences including Chaplin, De Sica, Welles and Capra, but he melded these with his own very Indian vision. *The Vagabond*, for example, saw the birth of Kapoor's version of Chaplin's loveable tramp persona, while also looking at the complex issue of nature versus nurture. Though the practice of incorporating song-and-dance sequences into the narrative was already prevalent in Indian cinema, Kapoor took it a few notches higher with the film's use of elaborate sets, intricate choreography and skilful editing à la Busby Berkeley.

These vagabond shoes: Kapoor's screen persona gave Chaplin's tramp an Indian twist

Though credited to director Prakash Arora, the 1954 melodrama *Boot Polish* bears Kapoor's stamp. An affecting early look at Indian child poverty, it's a far cry from *Slumdog Millionaire*. The following year's *Shree 420* reinforced Kapoor's tramp persona, while looking at the issue of rapid urbanisation in a young independent nation. After those well-received films, Kapoor took a break from directing, concentrating instead on establishing himself as one of Hindi cinema's top heroes, acting in a string of hits such as *Chori Chori*, *Anari* and *Chhalia*.

Alongside stars Dev Anand and Dilip Kumar, Kapoor formed the ruling triumvirate of Hindi films of the period. He also had a keen commercial eye as a director, as evidenced by the lavish love triangle *Sangam* (1964), which was filmed in several European capitals. His next directorial venture *My Name Is Joker* (*Mera Naam Joker*, 1969) initially weighed in at nearly four hours. Indian audiences rejected this episodic, tears-behind-the-greasepaint look at a clown and the women in his life. Undeterred, Kapoor returned with *Bobby* (1973), a fresh teenage love story exploring India's class divide. Marking the debut of Kapoor's son Rishi as a leading man, it was a massive box-office success.

Cinematically, Kapoor is also remembered for his worship of the female form on screen, almost fetishising several of his heroines: Vyjayanthimala in *Sangam*, Simi Garewal and Padmini in *My Name Is Joker*, Dimple Kapadia in *Bobby*. Outside films, Kapoor was known for his lavish lifestyle and legendary parties, which earned him the nickname 'Showman'. His brothers, sons and some of his grandchildren all became actors too – which is why the Kapoors are often referred to as the first family of Hindi cinema.

■ *A Raj Kapoor season plays at BFI Southbank, London until 29 February*

THE NUMBERS

Nothing to be ashamed of

Michael Fassbender proves he's still a box-office draw in 'Shame'. By **Charles Gant**

When the UK's Momentum Pictures signed on at script stage to distribute Steve McQueen's *Shame*, it had plenty of reasons for making the deal. It extended its relationship with producer Iain Canning, who had delivered mega-hit *The King's Speech* for the company. McQueen and Michael Fassbender had proved a potent combination with *Hunger*, which despite its tough subject matter delivered £807,000 at the UK/Ireland box-office. And Fassbender's star had clearly risen in the three years since he played Bobby Sands.

The impact of *Shame*'s sex-addict storyline was harder to assess. Sexual nudity can alienate more cinemagoers than it entices, and the film's bleak depiction of male sexuality and porn addiction was potentially a difficult sell to the lucrative date-movie crowd. But for programmer Jason Wood, whose Curzon Soho cinema is the film's top-grossing site, "the issues around sexuality have also given *Shame* something of a must-see factor. It represents the dark side of desire, something that Soho audiences seem keen to explore." On the other hand, Momentum rejected a poster featuring Fassbender's naked torso and rumpled sheets – used so far in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland – in favour of a clothed image that boss Xavier Marchand calls "stylish" and suggestive of "a big, classy movie".

Momentum's initial plan was to release *Shame* in November, following its London Film Festival bow. But when Fox Searchlight acquired *Shame*, setting a December US release date, there was pressure to delay. Eventually Momentum opted for 13 January, counter-programming against *War Horse*, and offering an edgier alternative to fellow awards-bait contenders *The Iron Lady* and *The Artist*, which were already in the market. An opening- weekend take of £542,000 from 114 screens resulted, yielding a healthy screen average of £4,752. A relatively modest drop of 31 per cent the second weekend leaves the ten-day total at £1.18m, well on the way to Momentum's target of £2m for the UK/Ireland release.

Both exhibitor and distributor agree that Fassbender was a big positive for the film's commercial appeal. As Wood says, "his track record means that arthouse audiences feel that they can trust him", while Marchand mentions the value of the actor coming across "as a likeable person", bringing warmth to a potentially chilly protagonist: "You can see that he's not out to hurt people. He's hurting himself."

Michael Fassbender at UK/Ireland box office

Film	Year	Gross
Substantial roles		
X-Men: First Class	2011	£15,033,195
Jane Eyre	2011	£5,076,087
Shame	2012	£1,180,690*
Hunger	2008	£806,517
Fish Tank	2009	£599,282
Eden Lake	2008	£484,454
Centurion	2010	£290,445
Smaller roles		
300	2007	£14,496,852
Inglourious Basterds	2009	£10,930,315
Haywire	2012	£1,197,866^

* gross after 10 days; ^ gross after 5 days

LOST & FOUND

Pride before the fall

Spain's Manuel Mur Oti had huge success under Franco. Since the fall of the regime he's been written out of history.
By **Mar Diestro-Dópido**

'Lost and Found' is generally a column about great but overlooked films, but in the peculiar case of Spanish director Manuel Mur Oti we're actually talking about the obliteration of a whole magnificent career. None of his films – including his 1955 masterpiece *Orgullo* (*Pride*) – is available on DVD, nor are his poetry or novels in print. Only two books have ever been written on Mur Oti's film work: the first (now out of print but kindly sent to me by the Spanish Cinematheque) written in 1992 by the great Spanish critic Miguel Marías; the second accompanying a retrospective organised by the Ourense Independent Film Festival in 1999, and very hard to come by. Gone missing from Spanish cultural history, Mur Oti is now only a well-kept secret to a small number of cinephiles; although he received an honorary Goya award in 1992, he's barely known at all to the wider Spanish public.

Mur Oti was born in Vigo in 1908, the son of a prison warden who struck lucky in the spirits business and moved the family to Cuba when Manuel was 13. There the young Mur Oti developed strong relationships with his mother and two sisters, and learned to work the land as a cowboy. The former would come to influence his powerful, fully rounded women characters throughout his filmography; the latter fed into his depiction of the extremity of the Castilian climate in *Orgullo* – essentially a Spanish western.

Mur Oti started making films in 1949, almost by chance, after being hugely successful at a series of other careers, including novelist, poet, scriptwriter, playwright, lawyer and even perfumer. By the time he returned to Spain in 1930, he was a well-known and highly respected figure. But what he should be remembered for are the 17 features he wrote, directed and produced (he ran his own production company) until 1976 – one of the most ambitious, striking and thematically consistent bodies of work in the history of Spanish cinema.

In *Orgullo*, shot and released in 1955, Mur Oti manages to gather together and distil all the recurring elements and preoccupations of his cinema: the nature of woman, human passions, and above all the power the land exerts in determining human affairs. As in his own previous film *Condenados* (*The Condemned*, 1953) – and such Hollywood epics as *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Giant* (1956) – *Orgullo* evokes the attachment of an individual to their land. The Hollywood references are not idle: for Marías, *Orgullo* stands comparison with the work of John Ford and William Wellman. It's the film in which Mur Oti single-handedly invented the European Western, preceding the success of Sergio Leone by a full ten years.

Land girl: Marisa Prado as Laura Mendoza in Mur Oti's 'Orgullo'

A spin on the *Romeo and Juliet* story, *Orgullo* tells of two families, the Mendozas and the Alzagas, who have been fighting for generations over the water from the mighty river that intersects their respective lands. The Mendoza daughter Laura (played by the beautiful, imperious Marisa Prado) returns to the farm after studying abroad, and falls in love with the Alzagas' son Enrique. Ignoring their families' ancestral rivalry, they decide to marry, but resentment runs rife among the workers on both farms; when drought strikes, it unleashes old grudges and drags everyone back into the conflict. Possessed by the same pride as their parents, the lovers separate and Laura – transformed into a woman as tough as the land she now has to defend – sets off with her men to find another source of water.

With 'Orgullo' Mur Oti single-handedly invented the European Western

Shot on location in the arid lands of Castilla – in rural areas known at the time as the *España negra* or 'black Spain' by virtue of their superstition, conservatism and violent crime – *Orgullo* captures vividly the desperation and bleakness of the post-Civil War era. Epic black-and-white cinematography by Juan Mariné (nicknamed *creador de la luz* – creator of light) brings out both the outstanding beauty and the harshness of the land – devoured by blazing suns in summer and bitterly freezing in winter – as immortalised previously by the paintings of Goya, the poetry of Antonio Machado and later by the films of Víctor Erice.

Outstanding in its scale and ambition, *Orgullo* displays a masterful control of cinematic language and genre conventions, but without ever resorting to cliché. Mur Oti slips easily and adroitly from horror (when Laura discovers her mother is dead) to epic (in depicting the search for water) to melodrama. *Orgullo* is above all a woman's western – Laura's feelings of love and pride are what propel the story forward.

Lauded as *El Genio* (the genius), Mur Oti was popular with critics and public alike, and *Orgullo* was invited to the Venice Film Festival in 1955. But it's precisely this success that's led to the obscuring of his achievements in the years since Franco's death in 1975. As film scholar Alberto Mira has explained, after Franco whole genres were ignored in Spain because they had been produced within the state-sponsored commercial cinema preferred by the dictator (who was famously referred to as a cinephile by Orson Welles).

A closer look at many of these commercial genre films, however, can occasionally reveal a veiled critique of the status quo. (Mur Oti, after all, fought with the Republicans and was sent to concentration camps in both France and Spain, only to be saved by his father, who worked in the local prison.) Of course, the highly stylised *Orgullo* resonates with echoes of the Spanish Civil War, chiming with Franco's vision of the war as crusade. But it is also firmly grounded in the historical reality of a tragedy that often tore whole families apart; most importantly, it exposes the absurdity of ancient disputes, the backwardness of provincialism and the devastating consequences of isolation.

The role of women is pivotal in Mur Oti's filmography, and although Laura is inescapably linked with the land (and hence with fertility), she's also a determined leader, very far from complying with Franco's ideal of submissive, domestic womanhood. Most tellingly, she works the land with her own hands (something her male counterpart is never shown doing) – an action that also eliminates class boundaries. In fact the images of the land and workers, and the emphasis on collective effort, are more reminiscent of Russian filmmaking and communist propaganda than of the staunch feudalism of the Franco regime.

But Mur Oti's work was doomed to fall into oblivion all the same. The transition to democracy in Spain fostered an implacable desire to break with everything that smacked of the old regime and its moral values. After 1976 he never directed again; his films simply did not fit with the post-Franco zeitgeist. The new mood stigmatised anything made under the Franco banner, particularly in the cultural realm. Even Carlos Saura and Luis García Berlanga were sniffed at by the younger generation for dealing with elements of Spanish life that Franco had fetishised, such as flamenco and folklore. But in the case of Manuel Mur Oti – arguably as great as either of those directors – the baby was most definitely thrown out with the bathwater.

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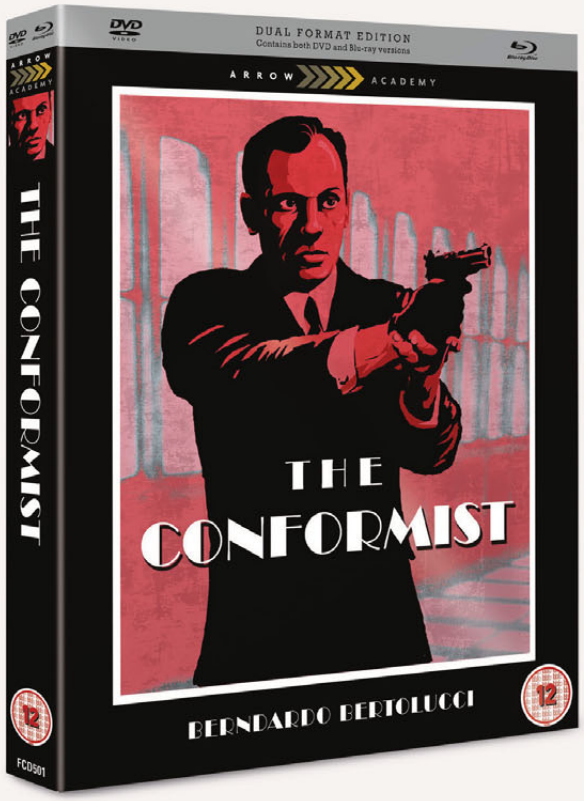

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OBITUARY

Theo Angelopoulos, 1935–2012

Michael Atkinson *pays tribute to the great Greek director, who was killed in a traffic accident in January*

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS/COURTESY ARTRICIAL EYE

One of the last great monumentalists, Greek master Theo Angelopoulos was as much a world-builder as he was a Promethean image-maker – in order to stop your heart, he would move mountains, flood towns, orchestrate entire cities. Dead suddenly, as productive 76-year-olds should never die – hit by a motorcycle on location – Angelopoulos was an entire nation's sole serious claim to cinematic posterity, but more vitally he was one of the irrepressible horsemen of art-film apocalypse, joining the ranks of Tarkovsky, Kalatozov and Jancsó, and helping to transform a popular vehicle for telling stories into a real-time relationship with the epically impossible.

In Western Europe particularly, where memory of the past weighs on life like cloud cover, the long, spatially expressive tracking shot enveloping whole landscapes and huge chunks of social phenomena has been an important way to shape cinema – and nobody could stride the stride like Angelopoulos. Whereas Tarkovsky's moody set-ups were metaphysical questions growing less answerable the longer they became, Angelopoulos's stock-in-trade mega-shots are best read as tangible translations of history into breath-holding visual experience. Few other filmmakers ever dared to employ such elaborate *mise en scène*, but fewer still used the aesthetic to express overwhelming ideas about nationhood, justice and mass consciousness. Time and titanic scale were his weapons, turning the wholesale tragedies of Greek and Balkan life in the 20th century into journeys without end.

After art school and apprenticeship under Jean Rouch, Angelopoulos started out as a journalist and film critic. When the left-wing newspaper he wrote for was closed down following Greece's 1967 coup, he started making films. *Reconstruction* (*Anaparastasi*, 1970) was a sociopolitically loaded if low-boiling beginning, but *The Travelling Players* (*O thiassos*, 1975) marked a gargantuan upgrade in rigour, ambition and scope, taking almost four hours (but only about 80 shots) to limn the years 1939 to 1952 and the travails of the titular acting troupe as they roam around the country and fail to perform together under various oppressive regimes and conditions. This was the filmmaker's first pioneering use of first-person testimony, delivered straight to the camera by the beleaguered characters, and this penchant for pungent reflexive slippage persisted in later films, which often portrayed years of tumultuous story passing by in the course of a single lengthy take. Quite possibly the most complexly conceived political film ever made, *The Travelling Players* instantly established Angelopoulos at global festivals, and forged an elliptically subversive way ahead.

Still, it wasn't until 1988, with *Landscape in the Mist (Topio stin omichli)*, that the full force of what Angelopoulos was capable of became apparent to world audiences. This epiphany was for many not only the greatest European film of the 1980s but also a redefinition of the art film as an ordeal by sympathy, monolithic visions and effortless metaphoric torque. From the giant statue's hand rising from the sea to the catatonic huddle on a snow-shrouded highway, any single scene could change your life, or at least what you expect from cinema. A single, lengthy shot of a parked truck, while catastrophically upsetting, might also be the sharpest critique of viewer omnipotence ever created. If you've seen it, you'll remember it forever.

This was not, in any case, a Greece we were familiar with; his vision of his country reflected the desolation of its political sufferings, and the trauma of its neighbours. In the 1990s, Angelopoulos became a fixture at Cannes awards ceremonies with his 'trilogy of borders': *The Suspended Step of the Stork* (*To meteoro vima tou pelargou*, 1991), *Ulysses' Gaze* (*To vlemma tou Odyssea*, 1995) – which controversially missed the Palme d'Or – and *Eternity and a Day* (*Mia eoniotita ke mia mera*, 1998) – which won it. Each film follows a weathered, ageing pilgrim (Marcello Mastroianni, Harvey Keitel and Bruno Ganz, respectively) searching for lost dreams on the refugee edges of the modern Balkan nightmare. One is tempted by now to say simply that anyone not awake or attentive to the eloquence and stupendous force of Angelopoulos's desperate cathedrals leaves him or herself out of one of the medium's great experiences – great in terms of both immersive exhaustion and symbolist frisson. The trilogy is not only ravishingly powerful but, as a study of modern social stress, sociopolitically necessary. Individual segments – the cross-river wedding scene in *Stork*, the monolithic Lenin-statue chunks barging down the river in *Ulysses* – could stand as galvanic masterpieces on their own.

Shooting in the farmlands outside Athens, Angelopoulos was wrapping up another, folksier trilogy – coming after *The Weeping Meadow* (2004) and *The Dust of Time* (2009) – when he died in January. The film he was working on, *The Other Sea*, pertained to the contemporary debt crisis in Greece, but how Angelopoulos might have framed this reality in relation to the texture of Greek history he couldn't resist unraveling may now, tragically, be only a known unknown.

■ *An interview with Theo Angelopoulos published in our February issue is available at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound*

Bodies in motion

As a Tate retrospective revisits her work, Barbara Hammer talks to **Sophie Mayer**

Barbara Hammer's most recent short film *Maya Deren's Sink* (2010) might never have come about without Tate Modern's retrospective of her work. Like so many of Hammer's films, it is a product equally of artistic curiosity and friendly collaboration. When Tate film curator Stuart Comer visited her to discuss co-curating the retrospective, he mentioned that he knew the sculptor who'd lived in the Hollywood house where Deren shot her 1943 avant-garde classic *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Calls were made, and Hammer found herself projecting footage from *Meshes* onto the house's remaining original fixtures.

That footage, which had its UK premiere on the retrospective's opening night, returns Hammer to her earliest filmmaking inspiration: seeing Deren's *Meshes* during her film MA at San Francisco State University in 1975, when it was the only female-directed film shown there. "Film offered visual and perceptual movement, intellectual history and the plastic arts, but there was also the emptiness," she recalls. "That was a real calling for me. There was a trumpet saying, 'Barbara, make film! Fill in that blank page!'"

Since 1975, when her graduation film short *Dyketactics* – the first representation of lesbian lovemaking by a lesbian filmmaker – wowed audiences with its gently psychedelic superimpositions, Hammer has been filling in the blanks. Her 1970s films such as *Superdyke* and *Multiple Orgasms* focused on newly out-and-proud lesbian feminist lives and loves; a radically embodied documentation continued with 2007's *The Horse Is Not a Metaphor*, shot during Hammer's chemotherapy for and recovery from ovarian cancer. These films feature an array of bodies – including the filmmaker's own – in motion, either in deliberately failed parodic performances of femininity (such as the open-backed bridal gown in 1973's *A Gay Day*) or in unusual gestures and poses of sensuality. *Nitrate Kisses* (1992) famously juxtaposes two older women making love with footage from *Lot in Sodom*, a 'lost' 1933 film which used Biblical themes as a high-camp setting for gay male desire.

Like many of Hammer's films, *Nitrate Kisses* also separates out the sound and image tracks, with a layered soundtrack of free-floating reminiscences, critical commentary and queer 1930s blues. Hammer

Artist at work: filmmaker Barbara Hammer

explains: "I edited *Nitrate Kisses* nine-to-five for a year. I found conjunctions and disjunctions through trial and error, trusting my own reaction. There's that moment when the back of the 70-year-old woman, with its soft skin folds hiding and revealing, becomes associatively the blank screen of history mentioned in the voiceover, and also the movie screen. I still get pleasure from that, every time the film's shown."

Like *Nitrate Kisses*, Hammer's more recent work has drawn on fragmentary archival finds about lesbian artists such as American photographer Alice Austen and French photographer and writer Claude Cahun, which lead her to fill in blanks in social and cultural history. "Walter Benjamin said we can tell a historical period by a fragment," she says, which for her stands as a corrective to Jacques Derrida's statement in his book *Archive Fever* that one cannot archive an emotional trauma. "I thought, no, that's not true," she says, "my best films come from a place of feeling."

By treating urgent silences and absences through experimental film

'I want to have people moving, finding power in their own activity'

form, Hammer bridges the divide in feminist film – the 'realism wars' – between the transparency and immediacy of *cinéma vérité* and the sustained intellectual process of avant-garde abstraction. Hammer has no time for such divides: her work uses abstraction to engage the viewer's mind and body.

This approach is exemplified by her new work *Hammer Expanded*, recently shown in the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, where viewers have to move around to see the images. The installation reimagines two of Hammer's own early performances using a new version of Active Annie, a Lazy Susan-based revolving projector platform that Hammer built in the 1970s. "When I saw [US experimental filmmaker] Stan Brakhage's work, I walked out of the theatre door and saw the world differently," she explains. "So I wanted to take that further, and have people moving, finding power in their own activity during the screening – to move them from participating in the artwork to larger political action, even if I have to start small as a film-poet."

An activist as well as an artist, Hammer has recently returned from participating in the first US queer delegation to Palestine (after turning down a residency in Israel in 2011). She strongly believes that "politics is entering art again", with queer artists having the opportunity to organise for larger social change. Having visited Occupy Wall Street, she's inviting members of Occupy London to attend her programme of films about artists' political action on 9 February. She is also hoping to visit Occupy London's free public debating arena Bank of Ideas, most recently based at a UBS office block in Hackney (www.bankofideas.org.uk).

Her fees for the Tate retrospective will be made public in the wage-survey database organised by New York-based feminist activist group WAGE. Hammer explains: "Artists aren't unionised, and often people see our work as only glamour and pleasure. I had a jumpsuit that I wore to shows in the 1970s with a film reel in tie dye embossed on the back, and in gold letters above and below it said 'Cultural Worker'. But that has so many meanings: artist Mierle Ukeles working with sanitation workers in New York, on the one hand, and Warhol's model of the Factory, on the other. The relation between art and labour is worth pursuing – there might be a film in it."

Hammer's films position her audience as cultural workers, too. The Tate retrospective – which includes film and video works by emerging queer artists such as Emily Roysdon that pay tribute to Hammer's influence and mentorship – testifies not only to the blank pages Hammer continues to fill, but to the blank spaces she encourages artists and audiences to seek out for themselves.

■ *The retrospective 'Barbara Hammer: The Fearless Frame' is at Tate Modern, London until 26 February*

'Nitrate Kisses' (1992)

'Sync Touch' (1981)

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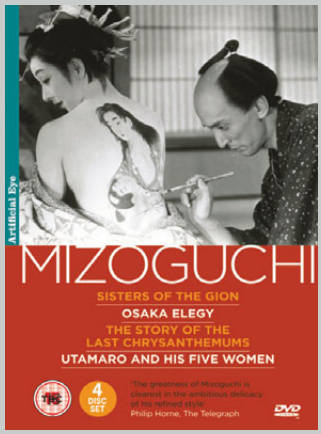

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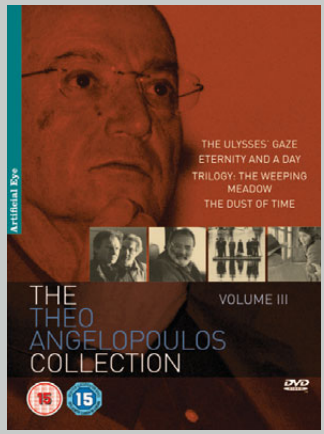

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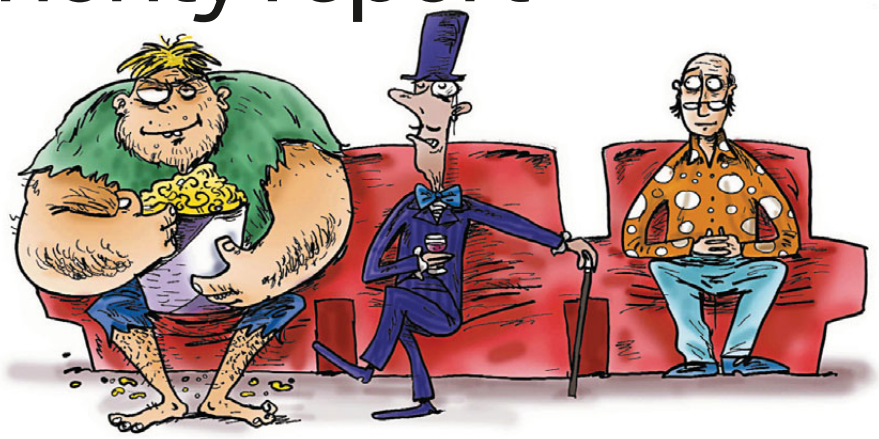
MR BUSY

Minority report



It may just be a clever inversion of The Jam's classic pop song, but "the public wants what the public gets" is a pretty good précis of UK cultural policy since 1945. As a definition of where culture comes from, it may not have quite the metaphorical elegance of "stuff that grows on the top of old marmalade". But it will do very nicely when it comes to film policy. What we seem to like (because we paid to see it) is what we get more of. What we don't seem to like (because we're nowhere near a cinema showing it) we can't really want so we won't get more of. It's a good market model, but what bothers me is the extent to which all become culturally complicit in it.

Accept the terms of the debate – basically a market-driven one, in which numbers trump everything – and there is no real counter-argument. Film is about box office; culture comes extra. The case for 'additionality' has to rely on government largesse (never in very great supply, and even less so now). We've been hearing this for so long it's hard not to be brainwashed into believing that we are a nation of philistines and that culture is a luxury item, to be measured alongside, say, the number of tables turned round annually by your average upmarket restaurant.

Despair not: this is not another response to Chris Smith's recent report 'A Future for British Film', which is full of good, solid stuff and some genuine moments of inspiration. No one should have been too surprised by it, since it was chaired by the same politician who masterminded the setting up of the UK Film Council. Indeed it is phrased in much the same language used by every piece of film-industry policy-wonking since (at least) the demise of the National Film Finance Corporation in 1985.

For the past 30 years, Westminster has had only one way of looking at things when it comes, rarely, to think about film. It's not the way Hollywood looks at them, of course, nor even the way Paris, Berlin, Oslo or Bogota look at them. But although the government organisation in charge changes every decade or so – meaning we put huge amounts of effort into reinventing the wheel – the basic philosophy has remained the same: we need to support sustainable British films – films that "put the audience first".

We don't really need culture, certainly not in an artform whose temples stink of popcorn and reheated nachos in tangy cheese. Culture is for posh people

The economic logic is impeccable: we shouldn't pour money into films that no one wants to see. Even the French – who invented the film-policy wheel very successfully in 1946 – have moments of thinking this. In a recent interview with trade mag *Le Film français*, for example, Thomas Langmann, producer of *The Artist*, railed against the granddaddy of all support systems, *l'avance sur recettes*, for backing artistic rather than audience-pleasing films. I seem to remember Alan Parker saying much the same thing when the BFI Production Board was backing Peter Greenaway. The point is: can box office be the only criterion for determining what we want to see?

For while Langmann's words run counter to the direction of French film policy, they speak to a belief deeply ingrained in the British psyche: that we don't really need culture, certainly not in an artform whose temples stink of popcorn and reheated nachos in a tangy cheese sauce. Culture is for posh people. Regular folks don't eat culture. But they may safely go to the pictures without fear of contamination.

We've been bombarded with this stuff for so long that we now take it for granted. A friend was telling me recently about an exhibition she had helped organise that had been touring Welsh museums. I prepared to offer some words of encouraging condolence: how brave, how noble, and how disappointing it must have been. But no, she said, crowds had flocked to it. The museums' footfall had increased dramatically, she added, apologising for using the language of the marketer.

That's when I realised I had been brainwashed into believing culture is, by definition, a minority activity, in need of subsidy and indulgence. Something to apologise for, belonging in the world of entreaties rather than demands. Like kids from a deprived background conditioned to believe they're thick, we as a nation have been brainwashed into thinking that film is about opening weekends and Oscars. If we want a different menu – if, as Wim Wenders once put it, we all like a hamburger from time to time, but we don't want European cuisine to disappear – then we will have to accept minority status.

It is, I think, a fairly recent disease as far as film is concerned. In the days of post-war austerity, when British cultural policy first evolved, the cinemas were full. No matter that this was the heyday of David Lean and Carol Reed, whose 1940s films meet every cultural criterion you could set. Cinema made money, so it can't have been cultural. We have lived with the legacy of this – a kind of Manichean view of the arts that links entertainment with commerce, and culture with some higher value – for far too long.

Perhaps I am talking about the Smith Report after all.

Nick Roddick

EVENTS

● **Kinoteka**, the annual festival of Polish cinema, returns for its tenth edition. The festival opens with Malgorzata Szumowska's 'Elles', starring Juliette Binoche. Alongside recent Polish cinema, including a preview of Agnieszka Holland's 'In Darkness', ten directors, among them Andrzej Wajda and Nicolas Roeg, have been invited to choose their own favourite Polish film. The festival closes with a concert at the Barbican featuring Krzysztof Penderecki and Jonny Greenwood. Various venues in London, Belfast and Edinburgh, 8-22 March. www.kinoteka.org.uk

● **Borderlines Film Festival**, the UK's self-proclaimed 'rural' film festival, returns with a selection of films playing in mostly temporary venues – from aircraft hangars to pubs, church halls to stately homes. Highlights include a screening of 'Whisky Galore!' in a pub, complete with whisky tasting, and 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' with live soundtrack by Cipher. Shropshire, Herefordshire and the Welsh Marches. 24 February-11 March. www.borderlinesfilmfestival.co.uk

● **Stanley Kubrick**'s 'Barry Lyndon' and 'The Shining' are both being screened at a special event organised by the Cambridge Film Festival, held in the opulent surroundings of Wrest Park, an 18th-century stately home not far from the house Kubrick lived in for over 20 years. Kubrick's producer Jan Harlan will introduce both screenings, on 25 February. www.cambridgefilmfestival.org.uk

● **Abel Gance's 1927 'Napoleon'** (below) is finally being screened in the acclaimed five-and-a-half-hour restoration completed by Kevin Brownlow in 2000. It receives its US premiere at the San Francisco Silent Film Festival on 24 March, with Carl Davis conducting his score. A UK screening will take place at the Royal Festival Hall in November 2013. www.silentfilm.org

● **'Whose Film Is It Anyway?'** is a touring programme of recent Japanese films organised by the Japan Foundation, and selected for their 'narrative creativity'. Films include Suo Masayuki's 'I Just Didn't Do It' and Nagasaki Shunichi's 'Heart, Beating in the Dark'. Various cities nationwide. www.jpf-film.org.uk

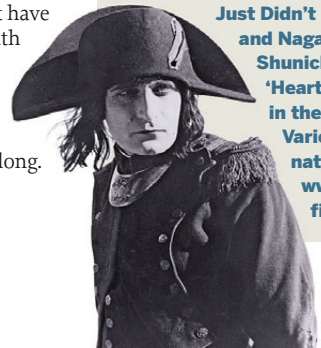


ILLUSTRATION BY IAN JACKSON/BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (1)

David Cronenberg may be better known for visceral horror than costume drama but 'A Dangerous Method', his new study of the early days of psychoanalysis, is about talking heads in tight collars, says **Nick James**

ANALYSE THIS

Suppose it's 2014, you're doing some TV surfing and you stumble across *A Dangerous Method*. My guess is that, if you hadn't seen it before, you might find it hard to identify quickly as a David Cronenberg film. For one thing, there's not much depiction of the unreal or fantastic about it; it's a costume drama set in the early years of the 20th century that depicts the lives of people who really existed. What might give its authorship away, however, is the terrific restraint of the *mise en scène* and the strict maintenance of an atmosphere of utter respectability even when the acts depicted might seem a little perverse.

Put simply, *A Dangerous Method* portrays a series of encounters between early pioneers in the field of psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen), Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) and a young patient of his, Sabina Spielrein (Keira Knightley), who herself later becomes an analyst. While we're used to seeing Cronenberg's characters portrayed with a clinical lack of bias and a forensic presentation of ideas, this may be the first of his films in which talking predominates throughout. But that's only apt since the film's subject is Freud's 'talking cure', as first practised by Jung on Spielrein, then a young patient suffering from hysteria.

The film had a long genesis. Christopher Hampton originally wrote a screenplay called *Sabina* as a vehicle for Julia Roberts in 1997, when she was a huge box-office star. When that didn't come off, Hampton decided the subject was too good to waste and so he turned it into a play, *The Talking Cure*, which shifted the focus slightly so that Jung had as much importance as Spielrein. The play – which opened at the National Theatre ➡

MADNESS IN HIS METHOD
David Cronenberg on the set of 'A Dangerous Method'

MEN OF SCIENCE The professional collaboration between Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen, left) and Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender, right) is complicated by Jung's relationship with Sabina Spielrein (Keira Knightley, opposite). Below right: Charcot's photos of hysterics

in 2002 starring Ralph Fiennes as Jung, Jodhi May as Spielrein and Dominic Rowan as Freud – was a great success. Adapted back into a screenplay, it came to the attention of Cronenberg – as our interview below reveals – via his own connection with Fiennes. The film's title *A Dangerous Method*, meanwhile, flips back to a key source book, John Kerr's 1993 history of the three protagonists, *A Most Dangerous Method*.

Though the weight of Cronenberg's film falls more on Fassbender's Jung, one of the most remarkable things about it is Keira Knightley's portrayal of Spielrein, particularly at the beginning where she is required to enact the symptoms of hysteria. This was a female condition of the time (the origins of which Cronenberg speculates about below) which seems largely to have disappeared, at least in the West. The play describes Spielrein as exhibiting a number of physical tics, and there are the famous photographs of 19th-century hysterics taken by the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot to draw on. But even knowledge of those does not prepare you for the remarkably violent distortion of face and figure Knightley achieves in the opening scene. Knightley is an actress who many British sophisticates react to in a knee-jerk negative manner; this performance ought to show them how unfair they are.

As one would expect, the script is not shy about turning what is only considered a possibility – that there was a physical relationship between Jung and Spielrein – into a visual fact. But that bond is merely one of many tested in this crystalline film. There's the subtle, indurated relationship between Jung and his wife Emma (beautifully played by Sarah Gadon); the struggle for scientific acceptance that Freud and Jung engage in together at first – and that later becomes a battleground between them; and then there's the influence on Jung of the aptly named wild-card psychotherapist Otto Gross (Vincent Cassel), who openly advocates sexual intercourse with patients.

The interview that follows took place during the BFI London Film Festival last year. Cronenberg was in good spirits, and at *S&S* we felt the interview was engrossing enough to run at some length.

Nick James: What first inspired you to make 'A Dangerous Method'?

David Cronenberg: I read the script out of curiosity because I saw Ralph [Fiennes] was in the original production [of Christopher Hampton's source play *The Talking Cure*] playing Jung, and I was interested in Ralph because of [Cronenberg's 2002 film] *Spider*. When I was a budding filmmaker, there was a workshop I did at CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation], and the play I chose to do was *Total Eclipse*, Christopher [Hampton]'s early play, so I felt a connection with him – even if, at that point, I didn't really know him. When I read *The Talking Cure*, I just thought it would make a wonderful movie. It unleashed the desire to delve into Freud and the birth of psychoanalysis and that strange new relationship that had never existed before between an analyst and a patient – [a relationship that's] strangely intimate and clinical at the same time, complicated by the fact of transference and so on. You never know where a movie is going to come from, and in a way this film popped out at me almost unexpectedly.

NJ: One of the fascinating ideas in the film is that the hysteria that Freud studied in his first book was a phenomenon of that time alone.

DC: Yes, it's really fascinating. These things have been noted since. There have been some very interesting articles about diseases that seem not to be organic. Of course, they are organic ultimately, but somehow they're generated by society at large. It's very easy to see hysteria – the word coming from the Greek word for uterus and the fact that they'd remove the uteruses of women to cure the disease; a hideous idea, but they did it – as coming from the repression of women and their sexuality at the time, put on a pedestal like goddesses and worshipped, but not allowed to be sexual or intellectual. A so-called disease like that reveals so many things.

'Keira said: "It's going to be extreme. It's somebody completely out of control. How are we going to do this?"'

Of course Charcot was a big influence on Freud. Hysteria was Charcot's specialty, and his work provided a lot of research for Keira [Knightley] and I to look at. To see Charcot's photos and to read Jung's notes on Sabina's symptoms meant you could be very accurate as to what she would've been like.

NJ: Hysteria is such an extraordinary thing to try to act. How did the two of you come up with Knightley's approach to her performance as Sabina Spielrein?

DC: Basically we're saying, "This is hysteria." We have examples of it here in photos, we have Sabina's symptoms noted, and then we had some footage of patients suffering from hysteria. It's pretty much unwatchable. You are watching people mutilating themselves and deforming themselves out of their own anguish, and it's absolutely manifested into their own bodies. It's extremely disturbing. Then here it is, right at the beginning of the movie. We're hitting the audience with no preparation, no discussion, no introduction to hysteria. I love that element of the script.

Keira said to me, "It's going to be pretty extreme. After all, she's being instititionalised. It's not just someone sitting there being mildly neurotic, it's someone completely out of control. How are we going to do this? Use my body instead of my face so you have a chance to cut around it if it becomes too much?" I said, "No, we're not going to do any cutting around. It should be centred absolutely around your face and mouth, because you are speaking the unspeakable. You are a young woman of some standing, from a wealthy family, and you are saying you masturbate out of sexual excitement at your father beating your bottom."

You can't say this stuff, but she needs to say it because actually for the first time someone has asked her to say it. This is 'the talking cure'. This is the revolution of Freud. So she's wanting to say these things and exorcise them that way, but at the same time part of her is wanting to pull them back. Hence the jaw deforming: can we deform these words so no one will understand these

horrible things I'm saying? So that's how we came to that. Then it was up to Keira to really manifest that beautifully. We did one rehearsal and said, "Wow, let's do that."

NJ: It's a new kind of body horror, in a way.

DC: The way a mental state manifests itself in a body has always been of interest to me. To me there is no separation between them, so it makes sense, even in subtle ways like the way tension can constrict all the veins and arteries in your body. When I'm doing this [film], I'm not thinking of my other movies or of body horror. I'm only thinking that we have to deliver to the audience the reality of this disabling, weird disease that doesn't exist anymore – this is the prime motivator of the whole movie as well as the relationship, as she wouldn't have met Jung otherwise. But the connection you're making is completely legitimate.

NJ: There's also this strange disconnect as Jung is prepared to sit there and, despite her symptoms, say: "Well, you can still be a psychoanalyst. That's OK."

DC: Almost everyone who went under psychoanalysis wanted to be a psychoanalyst – and could be. After all, what it was to be a psychoanalyst was still being invented. The boundaries were not yet set. Otto Gross could very legitimately say, "Why not have sex with your patient? What if it's therapeutically good? Why not do it?" Then you could say, "It seems odd, but maybe you're right." Because no one knew. It was incredibly exciting to them. You see the passion and the obsessiveness that the whole idea of the unconscious – and what it was revealing – gave to those people.

NJ: One of the things I love about the film is that the visual side is very uncluttered and clinical. The costumes of the time are very restricting and formal and tremendously elegant. You also have the figure of Jung's wife Emma (Sarah Gadon), who is extremely still in contrast with Sabina. Was that a conscious formulation?

DC: It flows naturally out of the writing and the reality of those characters and of the time. I don't do storyboards. I don't come to the film with a preconceived overall ruling concept. I want the movie to reveal itself to me, to tell me what it wants – then [I can] give it what it wants. At that point I'm not thinking about my other movies, because they're irrelevant in terms of this movie. Then I can analyse after the fact.

Of course I'm also collaborating with my production designers, my set designer and Peter Suschitzky, my director of photography. What we're seeing, as we're creating the sets and deciding what the costumes must be to be accurate, is that the ethos of the time is really controlling, gradually, the style of the movie – the formalism, and the feeling that everything is nicely controlled. The Austro-Hungarian Empire has lasted for 700 years. We have a lovely emperor – he's 80 but is going to live to a hundred. Everything's under control. So that's giving me the shape of the movie. Of course here's Freud saying, "Not so fast. I too am a bourgeois, and I'm smoking cigars and I'm wearing the same clothes. But I'm telling you, this is not all there is. You must beware of the monsters from the id. Tribal barbarism and all those things are just bubbling under the surface, and if we don't acknowledge them, they will have more control over us than we would want."

Of course, the First World War proved him to be absolutely correct. It's hard for people now who have gone through a number of wars, including the Second World War, to realise how shattering the First World War was to Europeans. They really felt they were evolving this wonderful, supercivilised European society – and to have it immediately descend into the worst kind of tribalism and barbarity was such a shattering of ideals.

NJ: Freud was very keen for his ideas to have scientific legitimacy too.

DC: Both Freud and Jung were very ambitious, and wanted to be important men in their fields. Both were terrified of being called philosophers or artists, because that would completely subvert their desire to be taken seriously as medical and scientific men. In addition to that, however, you have what Freud said to Jung: "We're all Jews here in Vienna." The psychoanalytical movement is Jewish and that means – given the anti-Semitism, which was very formally recognised at the time – that the whole movement could be dismissed as mere Jewish mysticism or as some kind of sham, some Jewish trick.

The question is, was Jung an anti-Semite? Well, by the standards of his own time he wasn't, but by the standards of our time, I think you'd say he was.

NJ: In the same way that someone like T.S. Eliot was an anti-Semite?

DC: Absolutely. Freud would desperately have wanted Jung. He saw in Jung his perfect heir, because he was a good bourgeois, Swiss-German protestant, and if he was the leader of a psychoanalytical movement, the movement could not be ➡

ON AND OFF THE COUCH
Jung, right, is encouraged by Otto Gross (Vincent Cassel, below) to believe that it's OK to have an affair with a patient

accused of Jewish mysticism. That was one of the main attractions of Jung for him, as well as Jung's intellect and his charisma – things which Freud himself had. So it was doubly devastating a blow to Freud when he could see Jung was slipping away to Aryan mysticism, the other side of Jewish mysticism. It was Aryan mysticism and that whole *völkisch*-ness – that idea of blood and soil that the Nazis later used to such effect. But that idea preceded the Nazis and Jung was part of it. It was extremely important to him – it differentiated Aryans from Jews.

Jung even said later, "Freudian analysis only works on Jews." He said, "Jews should dress differently from other people, so we can tell them apart." That was before the Second World War, but it's pretty potent stuff. He said, "When we Aryans were running around the forests in animal skins, the Jews had 2000 years of incredible sophistication." But that wasn't meant as a compliment, because he said, "Jews don't have this mystical union with soil and ancient inheritance. They've been disconnected from that." The idea of the wandering Jew was fascinating to Christians.

It's kind of strange: the Jewish population [of Germany and Austria] was never that huge, but the focus on that was immense. Freud, of course, was totally aware of that and feared it in terms of the health of his new invention.

NJ: In depicting the past, were you also thinking of projecting forward to where things are today?

DC: I have a friend who's a social psychologist at Stanford and he said people come back to Freud in an interesting way. Maybe 15 years ago, there was a time where students would hardly ever learn about Freud. It was ancient history. Then they'd go on with their cognitive therapy, or whatever it was, ignoring Freud, and Jung as well. Not that there aren't staunch traditional Jungians and staunch traditional Freudians – there always have been. Then my friend told me that, using MRI – Magnetic Resonance Imaging – of the brain, we've discovered that what Freud said was absolutely right: there are all kinds of thought processes going on in the brain that aren't accessed by rational thought. They call it non-conscious as opposed to unconscious – I suppose to take the curse of the id off it. But it's basically what Freud was talking about, just as Einstein was proven correct once we travelled out to space in terms of his concepts of time and space.

'You have to be neutral. If the characters are being condemned, they have to condemn themselves'

So while Freud didn't have much scientific evidence – it was all intuition – it seems he was actually quite right about the way the brain works. So legitimised by modern science, people are starting to say, "Actually, we're not quite through with Freud, as it turns out." I read a wonderful article in *The New York Times* about China and its enthusiasm for Freudian analysis. It's become huge because of the growing middle class there, and their concern to become more middle-class and for their mental health, and suddenly they have the time [to have] analysis. American psychoanalysts are Skyping with their Chinese patients in the middle of the night.

NJ: To come back to the film, you describe Jung in a way that could make him sound villainous, and yet he is also the protagonist. The play is beautifully balanced between those two points of view. How did you preserve this balance?

DC: Christopher didn't have an agenda when he was writing his play. And I too – if resurrection was the project – wanted them to come back to life so you could see them and smell them and hear them in ways you couldn't normally – and to also resurrect the era. To do that you have to be as neutral as possible. Let them speak. If they're being condemned, they have to condemn themselves out of their own mouths.

The project was to resurrect them as they were and not to impose any structure other than the dramatic structure and the normal compression of art. After all, you're really compressing hundreds of people through their lives – wonderful, eccentric people you could make movies about: Otto Gross, for example, also Adler and Ferenczi, who makes a tiny appearance. It is the distilling the story down to those five characters. Apart from that, you're being as neutral as possible.

We had the documentation. It was an era of obsessive letter writing, and these people were obsessive. It is in the nature of analysis to be attentive to details that could be of some importance. So you have them writing about their conversations and their dreams and their sex lives, and what they ate and who met whom and what the dynamics of the room were. Therefore the dialogue is pretty accurate, considering no one was videoing them at the time. That's why, for example, I have Keira looking in the mirror when she's having sex. She would be. She'd be observing her reactions and then putting them in this structure they were building. Nothing went unobserved – they were they're own voyeurs.

That was really the goal: to be as balanced as possible. Some people have a very bad reaction to the Jung character, thinking he's kind of a creep and dishonourable in that relationship. After all, he's betraying his wife. But at the same time, Otto Gross did convince Jung that polygamy was the way to go. Jung would defend himself and say polygamy was actually a good and a viable way to live, and he would recommend it to some of his patients as a solution to their problems. You love your wife, but she isn't fulfilling your desires for a woman, so have another one. Could it work the other way? Well, I don't know if they got that far.

NJ: This is the most conversational film you've made: it's so much about ideas and talk. Did that concern you?

DC: No. Jeremy [Thomas, the producer] was worried there would be an accusation that it was too stagy and theatrical because of how much dialogue there is. I said, "Jeremy, this is a talkie. They've got to talk – it's the essence of the movie. You have to trust the actors, trust me to direct the actors. There's no way I'm going to cut it down to make it less talky. It doesn't relate to my other movies. The fact that people don't talk as much in *Eastern Promises* doesn't matter. If we're going to do this movie, this is the way we have to do it."

I never had any doubts myself. The idea that dialogue is innately theatrical is bizarre. You have Beckett's theatre, Pinter's theatre and there's not necessarily a lot of dialogue in those plays. So why is it theatrical? It isn't. As a filmmaker, I know that the thing I photograph most is people talking. Talking heads are the essence of cinema.

'A Dangerous Method' is released on 10 February, and is reviewed on page 63

LONG LIVE THE NEW FLESH

Brad Stevens *celebrates Cronenberg's 1983 'Videodrome', a film that keeps mutating into new versions and cuts*

GUT REACTION
James Woods as Max Renn in 'Videodrome'. Above, Cronenberg probes Renn's prosthetic stomach

Over four decades, David Cronenberg's career has progressed from his initial experimental works (*Stereo*, *Crimes of the Future*) through interventions in the horror genre (*Shivers*, *Rabid*, *The Brood*) to arthouse/mainstream hybrids (*M. Butterfly*, and now *A Dangerous Method*). But, having used early critical appreciation of his work as a tool to negotiate artistic independence, his oeuvre displays a remarkable stylistic consistency and thematic unity, while remaining immune to cinematic fashions. His fascination with those ways in which physical changes are linked to psychological ones is just as evident in his remake of *The Fly* (1986) as in his surreal meditation on William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1991), while his interest in racing cars has resulted in both a straightforward action movie – the seldom screened *Fast Company* (1979) – and a controversial adaptation of J.G. Ballard's supposedly unfilmable *Crash* (1996).

Taken individually, his films function just as smoothly, Cronenberg's meticulous *mise en scène* ensuring that onscreen events are viewed with calm precision – which makes it ironic that he frequently focuses on characters who are incapable of keeping their smoothly functioning worlds secure from the forces of chaos and unpredictability. His tone of contemplative detachment always exists alongside an intensely emotional identification with these characters – which suggests that Cronenberg has just as much difficulty as his protagonists in shielding his well-ordered artistic realm from the unpredictable threat of messy emotionality.

Videodrome (1983) is perhaps the key title from this perspective, observing its protagonist's breakdown with passionless objectivity while gradually taking on genuinely tragic overtones. The narrative – which involves the owner of a small television station, Max Renn (James Woods), who discovers a channel that seems to be broadcasting snuff films – encompasses any number of Cronenberg's obsessions. Note how even the superficially dissimilar *A History of Violence* (2005) has almost exactly the same structure, again focusing on someone unsuccessfully attempting to defend a day world of mundane normality against the incursion of a repressed night world associated with violence and perverse sexuality.

One might expect *Videodrome* to seem a little dated given its emphasis on early-1980s video technology, with VHS cassettes – their *noir*-ishly black plastic casings and sinisterly hidden interiors containing moving parts – viscerally used to erase the line between hardware and the 'soft' human body. This should, at least theoretically, translate with difficulty to the digital era, when films are sold on shiny discs (or downloaded in a totally abstract fashion) and the visual culture is dominated not by fears that the reality of the world may eventually be subsumed into the reality of the image, but rather by a suspicion that the image has become an unreliable guide to the world, having more likely than not been created by a computer (which in turn leads to the belief – vide *The Matrix* – that the world has been created by a computer).

Yet *eXistenZ* (1999) shows how easily Cronenberg was able to adapt *Videodrome*'s concerns to the age of videogames and internet communities, while *Videodrome* itself has aged in ways that might have been part of the director's design. The "New Flesh" into which Max Renn is being transformed seems much more comprehensible in an era of media-created realities where identity has been rendered provisional and technology can be crippled by a virus, while the idea of a corporation using televisual media to launch what is essentially a fascist overthrow of democracy has a chillingly contemporary ring. (Fox News, anyone?)

The idea of the image as virus was much discussed around the time of *Videodrome*'s production, especially in the UK, where a tabloid campaign against so-called 'video nasties' was in full swing. Cronenberg's film itself fell foul of this witch hunt: despite being passed intact by the BBFC for theatrical release, distributors insisted on making their own cuts (removing shots of Nicki Brand burning her breast with a cigarette, and part of Barry Convex's death) for the video release. This footage was subsequently restored to the sell-through VHS and Universal's DVD. But even these transfers remained incomplete, since the longer UK versions were identical to US theatrical prints, which had to be trimmed by approximately 80 seconds in order to qualify for an R rating. Universal released the unrated original on video and DVD in the US (it's also available on DVD and Blu-ray from Criterion), but recently put out a UK Blu-ray that contains only the R-rated variant.

Indeed, the film itself seems to have gone through almost as many mutations as its protagonist, the most curious of which is certainly the heavily censored edition prepared for US network television. This eliminates virtually all the sex, violence and bad language, while restoring 14 minutes of footage (including a bizarre animated credits sequence and epilogue) consigned to the cutting-room floor by Cronenberg.

The most notable addition is a sequence in which Max gets a phone call from Nicki (Deborah Harry) as she appears on his TV ("It's very complicated. It's not what you think. It's not what anyone has ever thought before"), then joins her in a limousine after being addressed by the image of Brian O'Blivion, who tells him: "When they reached the point where physics became philosophy, they asked me to help them. Now they've reached the point where philosophy becomes flesh, and they need you."

This scene also appears in Dennis Etchison's pseudonymous novelisation, and is the source for a frequently reproduced still. It's surprising this variant wasn't included on Criterion's disc, or at least plundered for a deleted scenes section. But most of the unique material can be found on YouTube (try searching for "Videodrome TV version deleted scene") – a website that might itself be the embodiment of Cronenberg's New Flesh.

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (C) ROBAL COLLECTION (C)

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MIZOGUCHI KENJI: Collection of films on DVD and Blu-ray

WIN

Artificial Eye releases a collection of films from the great Japanese director Mizoguchi Kenji. The collection covers four films from 1936 to 1946; *Osaka Elegy* – the story of a woman who engages in a series of affairs to raise money for her family; *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* – about a man who vows to win back his family after they've shunned him; *Sisters of the Gion* – about two geisha sisters; and *Utamaro and his Five Women* – a portrait of the artist Utamaro Kitagawa. We have two DVD and two Blu-ray editions to give away. To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state if you prefer a DVD or Blu-ray edition:

Q. In 'The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums', what is the character Kikunosuke's profession?
a. Cook
b. Businessman
c. Actor

AV FESTIVAL: Two pairs of weekend passes to be won

The AV festival is a leading International Festival of contemporary art, music and film taking place across Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland and Middlesbrough from 1 to 31 March. This year the theme is 'As Slow As Possible', and films by Fred Kelemen, Ben Rivers, Béla Tarr, Lisandro Alonso and others are featured. (Full programme information can be found on: **www.avfestival.co.uk**). We have two pairs of passes to give away, useable for any screenings on the 'Slow Cinema Weekend' from 8 to 11 March.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and include a contactable number:

Q. For which Béla Tarr film was Fred Kelemen cinematographer?
a. Sátántangó
b. Werckmeister Harmonies
c. The Turin Horse

(Winners will be picked and notified on 29 February. Special-rate hotel offers will also be available.)

'Frost', Fred Kelemen

TWO-LANE BLACKTOP: Three steelbook editions to be won

Funded by Universal in a bid to recreate the success of *Easy Rider*, Monte Hellman's road movie is now regarded as one of the key films of the New Hollywood renaissance of the early 1970s. Singer-songwriter James Taylor and Dennis Wilson of The Beach Boys star in this timeless portrait of lives in transit and of a country questioning its identity. Eureka! releases a high-definition restoration on Blu-ray plus a special Steelbook Blu-ray edition.

We're giving away a top prize of the steelbook plus a limited-edition poster from the film. Two runners-up will receive the steelbook.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which of these actors plays one of the hitchhikers in 'Two-Lane Blacktop'?
a. Harry Dean Stanton
b. Christopher Walken
c. Kris Kristofferson

WIN

DIANE KEATON: Five copies of her memoirs to be won

WIN

Known for her comedy roles, most notably the kooky Annie Hall, Diane Keaton has garnered a reputation as a beloved Hollywood actress ever since. Now in her autobiography (published by Fourth Estate) Keaton gives a humorous and endearing account of her life, her films and her loves (who include Woody Allen, Warren Beatty and Al Pacino). Much attention is also given to the influence of her mother Dorothy Hall, with an unflinching portrait of a loving but complicated relationship. *Then Again* makes for an unstarry and quirky memoir by the Hollywood actress.
We have a five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. In which film does Diane Keaton play the character Kay Adams?
a. The Godfather
b. Manhattan
c. Manhattan Murder Mystery

HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Mizoguchi Collection', 'Two-Lane Blacktop Steelbook edition', 'AV Festival Weekend Pass' or 'Diane Keaton books' in the subject heading, to s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk
Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Mizoguchi Collection competition', 'Two-Lane Blacktop Steelbook edition competition', 'AV Festival Weekend Pass competition', or 'Diane Keaton book competition', Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

The deadline for the AV Festival Pass competition is Wednesday 29 February 2012

The deadline for all other competitions is Tuesday 13 March 2012

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

* The prizewinners of the AV festival passes will be picked at random and notified on 29 February. (Passes are non-transferable and there is no cash alternative.)
* The prizewinners of all other competitions will be picked at random and notified within ten days of the closing date.
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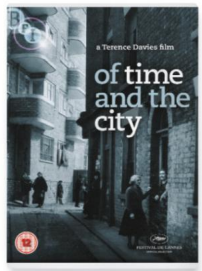

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Rereleased to coincide with a major new David Hockney exhibition, Jack Hazan's 1974 film 'A Bigger Splash' is a fascinating document of the artist and his circle, says **Ian Massey**. *Overleaf, Turner Prize-winner* **Mark Leckey** *on the collision of two media, film and paint*

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

As I write, David Hockney is pretty much inescapable, he and his Yorkshire landscapes the subjects of massive media attention as his Royal Academy blockbuster gets underway. He is 74 and as good for a line of copy as ever he was. Of the artists of his generation, he has always been the most dazzling, and the cinematic scale of his recent work is merely the latest manifestation of a spectacle – of both art and personality – played out in public over five decades.

In a filmed interview included with the new DVD release of the 1974 Hockney documentary *A Bigger Splash*, director Jack Hazan makes plain that his approach to the film was based on the sensibility of Warhol's films, citing in particular Warhol associate Paul Morrissey's *Flesh* (1968). Watching Hazan's film now, I'm also struck by its similarities to David Bailey's 1973 television documentary about Warhol, a work that was equally controversial in its day. In each, the artist is the still centre of an entourage enacting or re-enacting its own cult of personality, its own myth, to camera. And the parallels between these two quintessential 20th-century artists are manifold: each of them a self-creation flirting with irony and artifice, with perceptions of class and queerness, each cultivating mystique from the dualistic disguise of dandyism. And both are essentially portraitists, variously in thrall to photography and the world of surfaces.

A Bigger Splash centres on the breakdown of the relationship between Hockney and his American lover Peter Schlesinger – a story that provides the film's "coalface", as Hazan puts it. The affair and its aftermath are delineated more coherently in both Hockney's autobiography and Christopher Simon Sykes's recent biography, though factual coherence is not the real point here, as the film seems largely an exercise in the exploration of narrative configuration and the generation of atmosphere.

Although much of it reads as linear documentary, *A Bigger Splash* is a construct, collaged together in the cutting room from scenes shot out of sequence, its final structure the result of much deliberation. Its blend of *vérité* and artifice – part Factory, part *Carry On* – combines Hazan's footage from real events and unscripted re-enactments. It's the lie that tells the truth: "Truer than the truth," as Ossie Clark said post-screening, though just whose truth is unclear. As a film it's too long, the obliquely pregnant longueurs the result of Hazan's occasional attempts to impose dramatic tension, and of too much acting by non-actors – of whom Hockney, I suppose unsurprisingly, appears the most natural.

The story is told largely in retrospect, looping backwards then forwards in time, its endpoint also its beginning. Narrative signposting comes from Patrick Gowers's melodramatic score, and from Mo McDermott's frequent voiceovers, enunciated in a world-weary Northern camp. "It's over," is his first utterance. "He phoned me last night and told me Peter's leaving him. He was so beautiful. Like a Greek god... When love goes wrong there's more than two people suffer" – this last rather aggrandising refrain reiterated later in the film.

The tone is set in the opening credits, as the cast – each represented by their Hockney portrait – are introduced in a sequence overlaid by Gowers's score at its most portentous. The gang's all here: Schlesinger, textile designer Celia Birtwell and her fashion-designer husband Ossie Clark, MoMA curator Henry Geldzahler, Hockney's gallerist John Kasmin, artist Patrick Procktor, model Joe McDonald et al. There follows a montage of press cuttings and colour-supplement profiles, a flickering photo-chronology of Hockney's propulsion to international fame, the accoutrements of his self-perpetuating myth furnishing a brand of ironic glamour – the gold lamé jacket, the peroxided Artful Dodger haircut, Le Corbusier specs etc.

In a film about an artist who at this early-1970s juncture was heavily reliant on photographic source material, Hazan is good at making nuanced connections between film and Hockney's painted shorthand of photographic colour, light and reflection. We see how the inherent detachment of the photograph is rendered in paint, and the sheen of photo emulsion translated in acrylic washes – then referenced also in the reflective surfaces of water and glass in Hazan's film. There is a marvellous sequence in which massed photographs of an underwater swimmer are laid edge to edge in an echo of film and its processes, followed by a switch to Hockney in his studio working on *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*, in which the light and movement of water captured in one of these photographs are transcribed as a fractured mosaic.

"When you go into the world of David Hockney, it's easy," Hazan recalled in 2003. "The set is

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST
Filming Hockney, above, and his entourage, Hazan, left with camera, chronicled the end of the painter's relationship with Peter Schlesinger, in pool far left

designed for you. It's all planes – it's almost like a film set." Here everything is a form of portraiture. Filmed in Hockney's sitting room, the glass and chrome table, the Lalique lamp, the vases of tulips that we recognise as components from the iconography of his art speak both of elegance and of Schlesinger's absence. Later on, in one of a number of surreal moments in which Hockney's portraits and their subjects appear together as if by magic, Clark takes his white cat to stand in front of *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* at the Tate. In their painted versions, as Renaissance nobility reborn in a new aristocracy of talent, he and Birtwell stare out both at him and at us: it's a play within a play, in which artifice begets artifice.

Collisions

Among the more telling documentary scenes is one shot at what Derek Jarman termed the "Ascot of radical drag", Andrew Logan's 'Alternative Miss World', staged in an old jigsaw factory in North London. A motley bohemian crowd whoop it up as Jarman (as Miss Issippi) and others sashay down the aisle in gay-liberationist drag. Hockney and the painter Robert Medley are among the judges, Kasmin's aristocratic backer Sheridan Dufferin and fashion journalist Michael Roberts among those slumming it in the crowd. It's a moment that says something about the period's collisions between fashion, art and music, while also documenting a gestating radical gay politics, one that surfaced powerfully in the 1980s.

The film's depictions of gay life – including a fumbling coupling between Schlesinger and, it now transpires, a straight friend drafted in for the sake of art (a scene that accounted for much of the film's difficulty with the censor) – have lost their potency now. Watching that scene again I was reminded of how enthralled and embarrassed I was by the film as an art student in the late 1970s: enthralled by Hockney and his circle as the epitome of bohemian glamour, and embarrassed – in an art-college lecture-theatre screening – by the open depiction of gay sex at a time when I was still uncertain of my own orientation.

Another sequence, filmed at an Ossie Clark fashion show, has Hockney, Birtwell and Schlesinger in the front row of the audience – the latter in a sailor's top, for all the world like Björn Andrésen's Tadzio in Visconti's *Death in Venice*. The scene serves as a reminder of the ways in which Hockney's circle reclaimed and reinvented interwar modernity – of how they seized glamour as a liberating force at a time when, in Peter York's phrase, "Style became a weapon to forge your own legend." For this was the generation for whom the likes of Cecil Beaton and Stephen Tennant – the Bright Young Things of the 1930s – were the models, inspiring a hedonistic world of camply ironic nonchalance and legerdemain.

Hockney and his circle reinvented interwar modernity – they seized glamour as a liberating force

The 1960s and 70s manifestations of this world and its wider milieu are documented in Peter Schlesinger's 2003 book of photographs, his 'visual diary' *A Chequered Past*. It's a world now lost – the world of Gatsby before the Fall, before the wrecker's ball of Thatcherism and Aids. Like Schlesinger's book, Hazan's film serves also to remind us of the unfulfilled potential of wasted talent, and of those dead too soon: Henry Geldzahler, Derek Jarman, Joe McDonald from the effects of Aids, McDermott and Procktor from alcoholism, and the murdered Ossie Clark.

Towards the end of *A Bigger Splash* everything clicks into place, with Hockney in New York, the painting of Schlesinger he's battled to complete installed alongside others at André Emmerich's gallery on East 57th Street. He is filmed with a handheld camera, striding through the city en route to his exhibition, the streets full of urgent life and blaring horns.

"I'm always alone, looking," Hockney said in a recent radio interview. And perhaps, as obsessed as Warhol was by the image world, Hockney lives to some extent vicariously through those images of his own making – as do his public: each new exhibition, each new book and media appearance, a further stage in the unfolding story. Meanwhile, the good ship Hockney sails on: beguiling, unstoppable, a magnificent obsessive.

MOTION PICTURES

Turner Prize-winning artist **Mark Leckey** *examines the fascinating contrast of film and painting in 'A Bigger Splash'*

Jack Hazan's 1974 study of David Hockney does two really interesting things for me: it holds film up beside painting for comparison as a medium, and it takes a painter of portraits and makes him the sitter. Hockney's portraits are always of people he knows intimately, in the places in which they live. So Hazan gets to know Hockney through his friends and surroundings – a scene of fine art and high fashion that has a distinctly queer ambience pervaded by Wilde's dictum: "The more we study art, the less we care for nature." Everyone appears already in character, an exaggerated version of themselves. "It's beautiful," is the refrain heard throughout the film, and this idea of beauty seems to be deliberately depthless, all on the surface.

The same superficial quality extends to Hockney's paintings, but for an altogether different reason. The inherent flatness of his paintings at that time was a vestige of the High Modernist style that preceded him, which dismissed illusionistic space and modelling in light and shade; painting was about physical paint on a material surface, not about representation. So Hockney's paintings are very flat – they have no pictorial space. This presents Hazan with two problems: he couldn't 'step into' the paintings, nor could he get any of the subjects to act naturally when they were so determinedly acting unnaturally already. Both surfaces seem impermeable.

That the film is titled *A Bigger Splash* – even though its focus is on Hockney's struggle to finish another well-known painting – suggests Hazan's resolution to the problem. Hockney's actual painting *A Bigger Splash*, from 1967, has all the flatness I described: the sky, the building, the pool are just horizontal bands of colour all on the same plane, but the diving board in the bottom-right corner is rendered as if in real space. It lends the illusion that you could enter the painting and join the diver already submerged below the surface of the pool.

One of the reasons the painting works is because of its staginess – it is so obviously contrived – and this is what I think Hazan brilliantly recognises. He knows he cannot make a documentary following the rules of observational cinema, as artifice denies the viewer any direct access to the true 'nature' of the subject. So Hazan takes on the language of Hockney in its entirety. To make Hockney his subject in the same way Hockney makes his sitters his subject – and to take on Hockney's medium itself – the documentary becomes about cinema and painting. Hazan has said he was looking for some narrative conflict, a drama or dilemma, and there is one in the film somewhere if you really concentrate, but I think the real conflict is between painting and filming, the artist and the auteur.

The film offers up a direct challenge to painting, to Hockney and in particular to his *Bigger Splash*. A still of the painting fills the screen: a frozen moment held in suspenseful silence, which is broken by the sound of a big splash and a jumpcut to figures running towards another pool. The permanent, unchanging nature of painting is transformed by the fluid, mutability of cinema, which can make images come alive, bring them closer to life. Make them more real.

DAVID HOCKNEY 'A BIGGER SPLASH', 1967. ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 96" X 96". © DAVID HOCKNEY/COLLECTION TATE GALLERY, LONDON

THE PAINTING IN QUESTION
'A Bigger Splash', the 1967 David Hockney painting from which Hazan's film took its name

Painting, however, has a response to technical realism. Hockney has talked about painting's use of optical devices, and how its history can be divided into three stages: the age of 'awkwardness', when paintings were made without any technological assistance; the age of 'optics' when, from the Renaissance to the end of the 19th century, mechanical aids such as the *camera obscura* helped develop illusionistic realness; and finally, with the advent of photography, the age when painting was free to return to a state of awkwardness and convey all the hidden complexities of experience that mere photographic veracity cannot.

Hockney's work never fully embraced just how 'awkward' and *derealising* painting can be; his pictures are not abstract but fairly naturalistic, and they often employ photographic devices. While the few times in the film where Hazan attempts to project Hockney's subconscious demonstrate that cinema itself – as the surrealists knew – is an instrument of derealisation.

I find an equivalence (at least at the time the film was made) between Hazan and Hockney in how they approach 'realism'. (Hazan's technique has since found a home in structured reality TV.) All the artifice, the contrivances, the stagy flatness and apparent shallowness somehow come together to produce a real subject in three-dimensional space. Just as the fine, filigree brushwork of the central splash is a record of a body that has submerged beneath the flat surface, Hazan's equally textured approach makes his subject present. There is evidence of his existence and how it was lived – and what more would you want from a biographical motion picture?

'A Bigger Splash' is out now on BFI DVD and Blu-ray. The exhibition 'David Hockney RA: A Bigger Picture' is at the Royal Academy, London until 9 April

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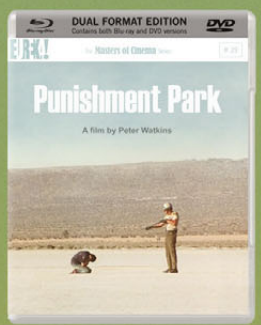

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Obituaries

January to December 2011
Compiled by Bob Mastrangelo

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (4)

BBS productions: with films like, clockwise from top, 'Easy Rider', 'Five Easy Pieces', 'Days of Heaven' and 'The Last Picture Show', producer Bert Schneider transformed the US filmmaking scene

BERT SCHNEIDER

Producer
1933–2011

In the mid-1970s, two men worked together on a movie that would be their last for a long while. The movie was 'Days of Heaven' and the men were Terrence Malick, who wrote and directed it, and Bert Schneider, who produced it. Neither took a vow of silence after it came out in 1978, but that is what it felt like. How else to explain why so little was heard from them in the decades that followed?

Then, near the end of the millennium, Malick started working again. Schneider never did (he produced one more film in 1981 that remains undistributed). But did he really need to? What he did at BBS, the company he had with Bob Rafelson and Steve Blauner, "kind of epitomizes the 1970s," director Peter Bogdanovich says today. "The director was the star and you made the picture. BBS symbolises the freedom that the 1970s is noted for." Schneider's films bear that out: 'Easy Rider' and 'Five Easy Pieces' and 'The Last Picture Show' and more.

Schneider died in December at the age of 78. Bob Rafelson once told me about how BBS came into existence: "We met many times and walked in Central Park." It sounds like the beginning of a fable, but what BBS did really was a dream: a sanctuary where unformed artists could congregate and flourish. Rafelson went on: "My thought was: there is so much talent here in the US but little talent for recognising it. I thought together we could do this but that Bert should manage it."

A famous American football coach said that you win with people. Schneider would agree. He colonised BBS with talented people, most of them friends or friends of friends. The net wasn't cast very wide. Rafelson described to me how it worked: Schneider was childhood friends with Steve Blauner and Henry Jaglom (who made two movies for Schneider). Rafelson lived next door to Dennis Hopper and their children grew up together. Bogdanovich asked Rafelson to attend the first screening of 'Targets' (1967). Rafelson had been friends with Peter Davis (director of 'Hearts and Minds', the Oscar-winning 1974 Vietnam documentary) since the 1950s. Jacob Brackman (who wrote Rafelson's 1972 film 'The King of Marvin Gardens') was Malick's roommate at Harvard. As Rafelson said: "All family. All lineage."

Schneider and Rafelson were more like brothers than partners. "He and Bob were very close and worked very well together," Bogdanovich says. Schneider was also the paterfamilias. He made everything go. "To get any of them to the post, including me," Rafelson says, "that took intelligence, wisdom, power, and charm. Bert was over-endowed." Bogdanovich remembers how the calm tone of Schneider's voice was in itself encouraging. When 'The Last Picture Show' (1971) was given an X rating, Schneider remained a cool customer. "He said, 'Let me take care of this,'" Bogdanovich says. "The next thing I knew, we had an R. We didn't change the picture. I don't know what he did." The son of Abraham Schneider – once the head of Columbia Pictures – had obviously learned a trick or two. "It was in his blood," Bogdanovich says.

He was, then, not only a radical. That's the word the press uses to describe him, referring – accurately – to his political commitments and lifestyle. "Polly Platt and I were married at the time and we didn't do drugs or drink," Bogdanovich says. "The story goes that Bert went to Bob and said, 'I don't know if we should do a picture with these guys. They're so straight.' And Bob said, 'We could use a few straight people around here.'"

But Schneider didn't just embody the excesses of his age. Sandwiched between two films about Vietnam is a 1975 documentary about Charlie Chaplin called 'The Gentleman Tramp'. Schneider's dogged efforts on behalf of Chaplin – a radical of a different sort – is a great little-known story of the period. Chaplin was returning to the US after an absence of 20 years. "He was going to be given a special Oscar," Bogdanovich recalls. "Bert called me and asked me if I would prepare the montage for the Oscar broadcast."

Bogdanovich returned bearing a 13-and-a-half-minute montage. That was OK as far as Schneider was concerned, but word got back that the Academy felt it was too long to run during a live show. "Bert looked at me and said, 'What should we do?'" Bogdanovich says. "I said four words: 'Bert, it's Charlie Chaplin.' He just looked at me, picked up the phone, dialled [Academy Awards show producer] Howard Koch, and said, 'We can't change it.' Koch said, 'Well, we can't run it on the show.' Bert said, 'Fine. Then Charlie won't come.'"

Schneider's career didn't really end with 'Days of Heaven'. "He was there for every film I ever did," Rafelson says. "Maybe not liking it, but there." He was present in another way: the BBS films placed down-payments on the professional lives of dozens of directors, writers, actors, and craftsmen. We must acknowledge him every time we see any movie starring Jack Nicholson or any shot composed by Laszlo Kovacs. His impact goes beyond his own credits. Maybe that's why, when thinking of Schneider's legacy, a line from a picture Bogdanovich made years later comes to mind: "I knew all this was too good to last."

Peter Tonguette

Late 2010

Chris Condon, 87: cameraman and lens inventor who was an important developer of 3D filmmaking.
Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu, 61: veteran French actor (*La Passion Béatrice*; 1988's *The Vanishing*).
Nikos (Nico) Papatakis, 92: French-based Greek director (*Les Abysses*; *The Shepherds of Confusion*).
Jean Rollin, 72: grandmaster of French horror, particularly known for his erotic vampire films (*Requiem for a Vampire*; *Fascination*).

Actors

Dev Anand, 88: Bollywood superstar (*Baazi*; *Guide*) who also found success as a producer-writer-director (*Hare Rama Hare Krishna*).
James Arness, 88: played the title role in *The Thing from Another World* and battled giant ants in *Them!*, but gained wider fame on TV's *Gunsmoke*.
George Baker, 80: busy actor on television who mostly played supporting roles in films (*The Ship That Died of Shame*; 1958's *The Moonraker*).
Heinz Bennent, 90: German supporting actor in international films (*The Last Metro*; Zulawski's *Possession*).
Helen Beverley, 94: leading lady of Yiddish-language films of the late 1930s, including two for Edgar G. Ulmer (*Green Fields*; *The Light Ahead*).
Roberts Blossom, 87: character actor often cast as rural old-timers (*Deranged*; *Home Alone*).
Alfred Burke, 92: star of TV's *Public Eye* who was a character actor in films (*The Angry Silence*; *The Night Caller*).
William Campbell, 87: played an assortment of sidekicks, friends and villains, and had lead roles in B pictures (*Man Without a Star*; *Dementia 13*).
Linda Christian, 87: actress better known as a tabloid figure (*Tarzan and the Mermaids*; *The House of the Seven Hawks*).
Diane Cilento, 78: Australian blonde who played leads in England (*Tom Jones*) and, briefly, the US (*Hombre*).
Jackie Cooper, 88: child star of the 1930s (*The Champ*) who later became a supporting player (*Superman* films) and an accomplished TV director and executive.
John Howard Davies, 72: child actor (Lean's *Oliver Twist*; *The Rocking Horse Winner*) who became a powerhouse in BBC comedy as a producer, director and executive.
Paulette Dubost, 100: French character actress who often played a variety of servants, notably as Lisette in *La Règle du jeu*.
Peter Falk, 83: excelled at both comedy and drama (*The In-Laws*; *Wings of Desire*), had a fruitful collaboration with Cassavetes, and found his greatest fame as TV's *Columbo*.
Edith Fellows, 88: child actress whose troubled life became a cautionary tale for later child stars (1936's *Pennies from Heaven*; *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*).
Anne Francis, 80: had her best film roles in the 1950s with *Bad Day at Black Rock*, *Blackboard Jungle* and *Forbidden Planet*.
Dolores Fuller, 88: girlfriend of Ed Wood and his leading lady in *Glen or Glenda* and *Jail Bait*, before later writing songs for Elvis Presley's movies.

Sue Mengers

Talent agent
1932–2011

When I called the renowned Hollywood talent agent Sue Mengers in 1999 to propose a profile for Vanity Fair, her first words – spoken in the hoarse, gravelly voice that was all her own – were: "Sue Mengers is dead." Of course, she was still very much alive at the time, although she was expressing how she felt, having been ill for many years and out of work, passed over by the business with which she was once synonymous. Twelve years later, on October 15, 2011, she did die, finally done in by a variety of physical ailments but – probably most importantly – by disappointment.

More than any other single figure, Mengers was the poster child for the free-wheeling 1970s, when Hollywood, floating on a cloud of cannabis, turned out classic after classic. She was the first 'super agent' (to use an overworked term), representing the brightest stars in town, including Barbra Streisand, Burt Reynolds, Ali MacGraw, Gene Hackman, Cybill Shepherd, Faye Dunaway, Ryan O'Neal, Dyan Cannon, Michael Caine and so on, as well as directors like Peter Bogdanovich, Mike Nichols, Brian De Palma and Jonathan Demme. With her blonde mane and oversized tinted glasses, Mengers had a mouth like a truck driver, and a gift for the politically incorrect that would have shamed Ricky Gervais. Her speciality was signing new clients, the bigger the better. Her line was: "Get rid of that asshole your agent." She once said: "I'm so driven I would have signed Martin Bormann."

Mengers moved from New York to Hollywood in 1969. Right away, she was a hit. "Talent responds to enthusiasm, and I was genuinely enthusiastic about these people," she recalled. "They could sense that." Actor-director Richard Benjamin remembered: "You wanted to be with her, because she seemed to be at the centre of everything. With her, you felt you were in the eye of the thing, and that was a good place to be." She snatched 'The Great Gatsby' (1974) for Robert Redford over Jack Nicholson, and put Dunaway into 'Chinatown' (1974) when producer Bob Evans wanted Jane Fonda. She got Paula Prentiss into Alan J. Pakula's 'The Parallax View' (1974) by telling her, Prentiss recalled: "'Go to lunch with him and wear very, very tight pants the way they do it at MGM' – which is that they sew them to your underwear. I did." Michael Caine called Mengers "a bulldog with charm".

She was famous for her exclusive parties, where she mixed and matched producers with stars. Burt Reynolds met Pakula, who put him in 'Starting Over' (1979). Paul Schrader met Lauren Hutton and used her in 'American Gigolo' (1980). Not getting invited was worse than losing a big part. "If my mother had been outside in the rain," Mengers recalled, "she wouldn't have been able to get in."

Then, in 1975, it all came to an abrupt end. Her boss Freddie Fields sold CMA, where she worked. She stayed on at the new agency (ICM), but it was never the same. Blinded by the conviction that the business would never change, she turned away new, younger clients and stuck with those she had built into stars. But several of her biggest clients – Streisand, MacGraw, Hackman, Bogdanovich, O'Neal – were in career trouble of one sort or another, and she was unable to rescue them. The 1970s that she had known were over by mid-decade. She was a queen without a kingdom, and one by one her clients left her. "I was written about so much, and made such a fuss over, I really began to believe I knew everything, and that if I ever left the business, it would collapse. I thought I was the most important person in the entire industry. It never occurred to me that the clients I really cared for could leave me. Or that they'd get old. I was totally an idiot."

Mengers did a brief stint at the William Morris Agency, but it was never the same. She left in 1991. Her husband, director Jean-Claude Tramont, to whom she was devoted, died five years later. She became a virtual recluse, rarely going out, but still receiving a stream of visitors paying homage to 'Sue Mengers'. Former studio executive and good friend Chris Mankiewicz said: "This is a business that is ruled by fear and insecurity. So I admire courage and guts and honesty almost more than anything else. She was fearless, and in the end it probably cost her career. But we certainly had a great run with her."

Peter Biskind

Betty Garrett, 91: singing and dancing comedienne who pursued Frank Sinatra as the cab driver in *On the Town* and was Janet Leigh's insecure older sister in *My Sister Eileen*.
Annie Girardot, 79: celebrated French actress who refused to be typecast (*Rocco and His Brothers*; *To Die of Love*).
Yekaterina 'Katia' Golubeva, 44: starred in *Pola X*, *Twentynine Palms* and two films for Claire Denis.
Michael Gough, 94: character actor known for his diverse roles in horror and Derek Jarman films, and as Alfred the butler in four *Batman* movies. *See p.31*
Farley Granger, 85: actor whose ability to portray torment beneath his boyish looks was effectively used by Hitchcock, Nicholas Ray and Visconti.
Dorian Gray, 75: Italian actress who had prominent roles with Fellini (*Nights of Cabiria*) and Antonioni (*Il grido*).
Dulcie Gray, 95: actress who frequently appeared with her husband Michael Denison (*They Were Sisters*; *The Glass Mountain*).
Lyudmila Gurchenko, 75: popular actress and singer of Soviet cinema (*Carnival Night*; *Siberiade*).
Edward Hardwicke, 78: Dr Watson on television and a reliable supporting actor on film (Attenborough's *Shadowlands*; Polanski's *Oliver Twist*).
Jill Haworth, 65: an ingénue in Preminger's films (*Exodus*; *In Harm's Way*) who later originated the role of Sally Bowles in *Cabaret* on Broadway.
David Hess, 75: actor in 1970s horror

Time does not wither: Googie Withers

films, most famously as the brutal, murderous Krug Stillo in Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left*.

Harold Hopkins, 67: Australian supporting actor (*Don's Party*; *Gallipoli*).

Bill Hunter, 71: actor who seemed to define Australian cinema for international audiences (*Newsfront*; *Muriel's Wedding*).

Sybil Jason, 83: child actress who was briefly Warners' answer to Shirley Temple, then her co-star (*Little Big Shot*; *The Little Princess*).

Shammi Kapoor, 79: shook up Bollywood in the late 1950s with his rebellious, rock 'n' roll-influenced style (*Tumsa Nahin Dekha*; *Junglee*).

Miriam Karlin, 85: versatile actress busiest on stage and television, with some notable film supporting parts (*Heavens Above!*; *A Clockwork Orange*).

Barbara Kent, 103: supported Garbo and Gilbert in *Flesh and the Devil*, was twice leading lady to Harold Lloyd, and starred in the essential late silent *Lonesome*.

Claude Laydu, 84: played the title role in *Diary of a Country Priest* and co-starred in Cayatte's *We Are All Murderers*.

Kenneth Mars, 75: unforgettable as the Nazi playwright in *The Producers* and the police inspector in *Young Frankenstein*.

Anna Massey, 73: distinctive actress, often in eccentric parts (*Peeping Tom*; *Frenzy*).

Paul Massie, 78: briefly a leading man in the late 1950s (*Orders to Kill*; *Sapphire*).

T.P. McKenna, 81: the magistrate in *Straw Dogs*, who also co-starred in Joseph Strick's Joyce adaptations.

Bill McKinney, 80: character actor who forced Ned Beatty to "squeal like a pig" in *Deliverance* and hunted Clint Eastwood in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.

Harry Morgan, 96: ubiquitous supporting player in a seemingly endless run of lawmen, townsfolk and military brass (*The Ox-Bow Incident*; *Inherit the Wind*), later popular on television.

Lisbeth Movin, 94: Danish actress who played the parson's young wife in *Day of Wrath* and the old widow in *Babette's Feast*.

Mary Murphy, 80: caught Brando's eye in *The Wild One* and played Fredric March's daughter in *The Desperate Hours*.

Nagato Hiroyuki, 77: starred in some key Japanese films of the 1950s and 60s (*Season of the Sun*; *Pigs and Battleships*).

Charles Napier, 75: tough-guy character actor with a Dick Tracy jaw and a deep, growling voice (*Rambo: First Blood Part II*; *Philadelphia*).

Marilyn Nash, 84: played the young woman whose life is spared in *Monsieur Verdoux*.

John Neville, 86: played Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Terror* and the title character in Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*.

David Ngoombujarra, 44: Australian Aboriginal supporting actor (2002's *Black and White*; Luhrmann's *Australia*).

Lena Nyman, 66: pushed the boundaries of sexuality in the cinema with her starring role in *I Am Curious (Yellow)* and co-starred in *Autumn Sonata*.

Richard Pearson, 93: character actor in small yet noteworthy parts (*Sunday Bloody Sunday*; Polanski's *Pirates*).

Paul Picerni, 88: busiest in films in the 1950s (De Toth's *House of Wax*; *To Hell and Back*).

Marie-France Pisier, 66: the elusive Colette in Truffaut's Antoine Doinel films, and an elegant presence in French cinema (*Celine and Julie Go Boating*; *Cousin Cousine*).

Pete Postlethwaite, 64: came to major film roles late but made up for lost time with a series of acclaimed performances (*Distant Voices, Still Lives*; *In the Name of the Father*; *Brassed Off*).

Zhanna Prokhorenko, 71: Russian actress known internationally for portraying Shura, Alyosha's love interest in Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier*.

Cliff Robertson, 88: Hollywood star who demonstrated an independent streak, both on screen and off (*Underworld U.S.A.*; *Charly*; *Obsession*).

Hind Rostom, 81: star actress of Egyptian cinema (*Cairo Station*; *Between Heaven and Earth*).

Jane Russell, 89: famed Hollywood sex symbol who made a scandalous debut with *The Outlaw*, then proved skilled at comedy (*The Paleface*; *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*). *See p.32*

Michael Sarrazin, 70: Canadian actor briefly in lead roles in Hollywood beginning in the late 1960s (*The Flim-Flam Man*; *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*).

Tura Satana, 72: cult figure who cemented her bad-girl image with her notorious performance as Varla, the gang leader in *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*

Iya Savvina, 75: Russian actress who played the title roles in *The Lady with the Little Dog* and *The Story of Asya Klyachina*.

Maria Schneider, 58: gained notoriety with her scandalous role in *Last Tango in Paris*, and later co-starred in Antonioni's *The Passenger*.

Miriam Seegar, 103: leading lady of the late 1920s and early 30s (*When Knights Were Bold*; *Seven Keys to Baldpate*).

G.D. Spradlin, 90: Oklahoma oilman-turned-actor who played a corrupt senator in *The Godfather Part II* and sent Martin Sheen on his mission in *Apocalypse Now*.

Elaine Stewart, 81: scene-stealing seductress of *The Bad and the Beautiful* who became a leading lady of the mid-1950s (*The Adventures of Hajji Baba*; *Brigadoon*).

Maureen Swanson, 78: actress of the 1950s who retired to become the Countess of Dudley (*The Spanish Gardener*; *A Town Like Alice*).

John Sweet, 95: teacher whose sole major screen appearance was as the American pilgrim Sergeant Bob Johnson in *A Canterbury Tale*.

Tanaka Yoshiko, 55: Japanese pop idol who also played the lead in Imamura's *Black Rain*.

Elizabeth Taylor, 79: legendary actress who was an icon of glamour, stardom and celebrity.

Gordon Tootoosis, 69: character actor who broke ground for First Nations actors in his native Canada and also worked in the US (*Alien Thunder*; *Legends of the Fall*).

Googie Withers, 94: leading actress of the war and post-war years (*One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*; *It Always Rains on Sunday*).

John Wood, 81: distinguished stage actor whose film roles grew in prominence, beginning in the 1980s (*WarGames*; *The Purple Rose of Cairo*).

Dana Wynter, 79: fled the pod people alongside Kevin McCarthy in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and was Kenneth More's love interest in *Sink the Bismarck!*

Susannah York, 72: broke out of ingénue roles with *Tom Jones* and gave a series of adventurous performances over the next decade (*The Killing of Sister George*; *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*).

Rosel Zech, 69: played the title role in *Veronika Voss* and starred opposite kd lang in *Salmonberries*.

Animation

Jordan Belson, 85: avant-gardist whose abstract animations often had a spiritual bent (*Mandala*; *Allures*).

Robert Breer, 84: influential maker of experimental animated films (*Fuji*; *Swiss Army Knife with Rats and Pigeons*).

Steve Jobs, 56: long-time chief of Apple who also transformed Pixar from a computer-graphics division within Lucasfilm into an animation giant.

Bill Justice, 97: spent 40 years at Disney, animating Thumper and Chip 'n' Dale, serving as an animator on innumerable features and shorts, and providing stop-motion effects for live-action films.

KOBAL COLLECTION (c)

Michael Gough

Actor
1916–2011

On 18 November 1947, L'Ecran français reported on the casting of director Marc Allégret's first British film, the Gainsborough-style bodice-ripper 'Blanche Fury'. The director "scoured all the theatres of London, searched all the agencies and unearthed a minor obscure actor, Michael Gough, who had never appeared in a film". This unknown figure, added the journal, "now looks set to become one of England's finest players".

If, as it turned out, Michael Gough hardly attained the stellar heights intimated by L'Ecran français, in a career lasting over 50 years he rarely turned in a less than stylish performance, despite some fairly abysmal films. In the heyday of Hammer he played (as he put it) "a poor man's Peter Cushing", lending his deep, deceptively gentle voice and air of avuncular charm to several of the horror studio's more relishably garish excursions, including 'Dracula' (1958), 'The Phantom of the Opera' (1962) and 'Dr. Terror's House of Horrors' (1964). In 'Dr Who' in 1966 he also played one of the Doctor's most memorable opponents: the Celesital Toymaker, a laconic mandarin with a taste for luring his guests into lethal parlour games.

Gough liked to describe some of his Hammer outings as "GTMAR films" – Get The Money And Run. It was these, though, that landed him his most famous role: as Alfred Pennyworth, Bruce Wayne's butler, in Tim Burton's 'Batman' films. According to Gough, when Burton, a lifelong Hammer fan, was casting the role he saw Gough collecting a Tony Award (for the New York production of Ayckbourn's 'Bedroom Farce') and exclaimed "That's the guy who's in all those terrible movies! He's our Alfred!" Gough provided exactly the element of poised British scepticism needed to balance Burton's wilder flights of fantasy. Gough stayed with the franchise when Joel Schumacher took over direction, becoming the only participant to walk away with dignity from the car-crash that was 'Batman & Robin' (1997).

With his feline features, shaggy eyebrows and long upper lip, Gough could play amiable, sinister or – most effectively – sinisterly amiable. Dreamy, slightly detached Englishmen suited him (he was Anthony Eden and David Livingstone for television) as did observer roles, characters standing at an oblique angle to the action, quizzically taking it all in and sometimes stirring it a little: mill-owner Michael Corland in 'The Man in the White Suit' (1951), Julie Christie's father in 'The Go-Between' (1971), Lord Delamere in 'Out of Africa' (1985), Cardinal del Monte in Derek Jarman's 'Caravaggio' (1986) – the first of several roles for Jarman.

Serious Hollywood attention didn't come until Gough was well into his seventies. "I love the Hollywood experience," he remarked. "They give you your per diem and that pays for a house." His first two stints as Alfred Pennyworth were followed by a role as social arbiter Henry van der Luyden in Scorsese's 'The Age of Innocence' (1993). After his final live-action role, again for Burton, as a crooked notary in 'Sleepy Hollow' (1999), he signed off with a voice part as the Dodo in 'Alice in Wonderland' (2010). The lack of starring roles in his career never troubled him. "I'm a featured support player, and that's what I'm happy being," he observed. "You don't have the responsibility of a star, you're not as expensive as a star, and you get lovely parts."

Philip Kemp

KOBAL COLLECTION/PHOTOFEST NYC/GETTY IMAGES (c)

Jane Russell

Actress
1921–2011

From the protracted, scandal-inducing marketing campaign for 'The Outlaw' (1943) to her 1970s Playtex adverts, Jane Russell was famed for her womanly silhouette. But what gave an original spark to both her beauty and her gift for light comedy was her almost masculine swagger: the kind of genial toughness that makes 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' (1953) a bosom-buddy movie. Not for nothing, in 'Son of Paleface' (1952), is her bandit/barkeeper monicker "Mike 'The Torch' Delroy".

Initially typecast by Howard Hughes's censor-baiting RKO publicity machine as a smouldering sex symbol and GI pin-up, she rapidly became famous out of all proportion to that first attractively raw but affectless performance in 'The Outlaw'. It was that "mean, moody, and magnificent" persona that got her cast in nearly-noirs 'His Kind of Woman' (1951) and 'Macao' (1952) as a femme fatale opposite Robert Mitchum, whose lizard-lid cynicism fitted nicely up against her sultry snarl.

And if a Life magazine pictorial had found her hilariously inexpressive teamed with Bob Hope for 'The Paleface' (1948) – "neck and neck with Dorothy Lamour in the 'Deadpan Derby'" – the film and its sequel honed the comedy chops and the purring alto that were to find their best expression in 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'. Here Russell's game, man-hungry Dorothy is the perfect foil to Marilyn Monroe's breathy charmer. In the number 'Ain't There Anyone Here for Love?', Russell strides appreciatively through the US men's Olympic team workout, squeezing and grabbing athletes with unabashed enjoyment and expressing a hearty appetite for "big muscles and red corpuscles". There's a delicious wit and knowingness, too, in her shameless courtroom take-off of 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend', a shimmying parody that's smartly self-aware as well as funny.

The role fitted her to a T, but the next few years offered her frankly inferior copies of it. A burlesque version in RKO's 'The French Line' (1953) had her feisty Texan heiress performing pelvic thrusts while singing 'I'm Looking for Trouble'. Her performance and her scandalously cutaway one-piece got the Catholic League of Decency and the censors agitated once more, presumably fuelled by the slogan "J.R. in 3D. It'll knock both your eyes out!". In 1955 she was miscast as a ditzy showgirl in the execrable 'Gentlemen Marry Brunettes' and, in one particularly ill-conceived number, cooked in a pot by African natives while singing 'Ain't Misbehavin'".

Raoul Walsh did use her sturdy, good-bad girl quality to fine effect, though, in the agreeably trashy 'The Revolt of Mamie Stover' (1956), where her dancehall-hostess-turned-war-profiteer has a stubborn grace: "I got a number on my back and they all know it."

But if RKO chose poorly for her (1955's diving drama 'Underwater!' was a thin excuse to show her in swimwear), Russ-Field, the company she formed with her husband, did no better. 'The Fuzzy Pink Nightgown' (1957), a weak kidnapping comedy, was her last star vehicle. Perhaps encouraged by the 1954 contract she'd made with Hughes, which in exchange for six films gave her $1,000 a week for 20 years, her film appearances in the 1960s and afterwards were mostly forgettable cameos. Hollywood had made her a screen goddess on the strength of a handful of movies, but served her poorly subsequently. Her level-headed autobiography gives the impression that she quit while she was ahead. "No bows, honey, just eight bars and off," as Dorothy put it. **Kate Stables**

Zdenek Miler, 90: Czech animator (*The Millionaire Who Stole the Sun*) whose many cartoons showcasing the Mole were distributed worldwide. *See p.33*

Cinematographers

Henning Bendtsen, 85: Danish cinematographer known for his work with Dreyer (*Ordet*; *Gertrud*) and von Trier (*Europa*).

Gunnar Fischer, 100: photographed a dozen features for Bergman (*Smiles of a Summer Night*; *The Seventh Seal*; *Wild Strawberries*). *See S&S August 2011*

Andrew Laszlo, 85: cinematographer skilled at location work, whether it be rural Ohio (*One Potato, Two Potato*), the streets of New York City (*The Warriors*) or the deep woods (*First Blood*).

Don Peterman, 79: cinematographer on a string of popular films from the 1980s and 90s (*Flashdance*; *Cocoon*; *Men in Black*).

Composers & musicians

John Barry, 77: one of the major film composers, whose scores include *The Ipcress File*, *Zulu*, *Out of Africa*, *Dances with Wolves* and, most famously, the Bond films.

Jack Hayes, 92: orchestrator on almost 200 films who collaborated with Henry Mancini, Marvin Hamlisch, Randy Newman and especially Elmer Bernstein.

Hugh Martin, 96: songwriter for several films, including co-writing 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' and 'The Trolley Song' for *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

Uan Rasey, 90: lead trumpeter of the MGM orchestra, notably on the studio's classic musicals, before playing the haunting trumpet solo on Jerry Goldsmith's theme for Polanski's *Chinatown*.

Directors

Ömer Lütfi Akad, 95: helped move Turkish film beyond its theatrical origins, using cinematic storytelling techniques (*In the Name of the Law*; *The Bride*).

Omar Amiralay, 66: Syrian documentary filmmaker often at odds with the Assad governments (*Everyday Life in a Syrian Village*; *A Flood in Baath Country*).

Michael Cacoyannis, 90: a dominant figure in the post-war revival of Greek cinema (*Stella*), who immortalised Anthony Quinn as *Zorba the Greek*.

Gilbert Cates, 77: director (*I Never Sang for My Father*; *Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams*) who produced the Oscar broadcast a record 14 times.

Liviu Ciulei, 88: Romanian theatre director and actor who won Best Director at Cannes for his third and final feature, *Forest of the Hanged*.

Ira Cohen, 76: artist, poet, photographer and publisher who made the noted experimental film *The Invasion of Thunderbolt Pagoda*.

Vittorio De Seta, 88: Italian director of short documentaries (*Isole di fuoco*) and the feature *Bandits of Orgosolo*.

Paul Dickson, 91: director noted for post-war documentaries (*The Undefeated*) and the industrial film *Stone into Steel*.

Tim Hetherington, 40: photojournalist who co-directed the documentary *Restrepo* on the Afghanistan war, and was killed while covering the conflict in Libya.

Pat Jackson, 95: wartime documentarist with the Crown Film Unit (*Western Approaches*) who was a journeyman on fictional features in the post-war years (*White Corridors*).

Gualtiero Jacopetti, 91: Italian journalist and filmmaker who made the much-imitated, sensationalist 'shockumentary' *Mondo Cane* and similar follow-ups.

Charles Jarrott, 83: director of the costume dramas *Anne of the Thousand Days* and *Mary, Queen of Scots*, and the notorious soaper *The Other Side of Midnight*.

Leonard Kastle, 82: opera composer whose sole effort as a film director-writer, *The Honeymoon Killers*, became an influential independent movie of the late 1960s.

Mani Kaul, 66: independent Indian filmmaker (*Uski Roti*; *Duvidha*; *Dhrupad*).

George Kuchar, 69: ultra-low-budget, campy underground filmmaker who made 200 movies (*Hold Me While I'm Naked*; *I, An Actress*). *See S&S November 2011*.

George Landow (aka **Owen Land**), 66: avant-gardist who parodied experimental cinema, including his own work (*Remedial Reading Comprehension*; *Wide Angle Saxon*).

Richard Leacock, 89: documentary director-cinematographer-editor who was a pioneer of Direct Cinema (*Primary*; *The Chair*). *See S&S June 2011*

Sidney Lumet, 86: brought a tough New York sensibility to American film through 50 years of award-winning films, from *12 Angry Men* to *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*.

John Mackenzie, 83: director of one of the classic gangster dramas, *The Long Good Friday*, among other film and TV work

Tareque Masud, 54: Bangladeshi filmmaker of documentaries and shorts who was honoured at Cannes in 2002 for *The Clay Bird*, his first fictional feature.

Adolfas Mekas, 85: avant-garde filmmaker (*Hallelujah the Hills*; *Going Home*) who also co-founded the influential magazine *Film Culture*.

Morita Yoshimitsu, 61: distinguished Japanese director (*The Family Game*; *Shitsurakuen*).

Silvio Narizzano, 84: Canadian-born director who spent much of his career in England (*Fanatic*; *Georgy Girl*).

Bruce Ricker, 68: documentarian who chronicled the world of jazz, both as director (*The Last of the Blue Devils*) and producer (*Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser*).

Raúl Ruiz, 70: incredibly prolific Chilean-born director of more than 100 films, ranging from *Three Sad Tigers* to *Mysteries of Lisbon*. *See S&S October 2011*

Ken Russell, 84: famed provocateur who had his greatest impact in the 1970s (*Women in Love*; *The Music Lovers*; *The Devils*). *See S&S February 2012*

Diamonds are forever: Bond composer John Barry

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (1) CORBIS (1)

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

Peter Schamoni, 77: director who was among the founders of New German Cinema (*No Shooting Time for Foxes*; *Spring Symphony*).
Don Sharp, 89: known for his atmospheric chillers (*The Kiss of the Vampire*) and for remaking *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.
Esben Storm, 60: Australian filmmaker of the New Wave generation (*27A*; *In Search of Anna*).
Otakar Vávra, 100: Czech filmmaker who was also a co-founder and long-time teacher at Prague's FAMU film school (*The Hussite Trilogy*; *Romance for Trumpet*).
Sarah Watt, 53: Australian filmmaker who gained attention with animated shorts, then moved into feature films (*Look Both Ways*; *My Year Without Sex*).
Gary Winick, 49: director (*Tadpole*) and producer (*Tape*) who was an early advocate of digital moviemaking.
Peter Yates, 81: British director, often in the US, whose wide-ranging career encompassed *Bullitt*, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, *Breaking Away* and *The Dresser*.
Binka Zhelyazkova, 88: director whose films were sometimes banned in her native Bulgaria (*Life Flows Quietly By*; *The Tied-Up Balloon*).

Producers & studio executives

John Calley, 81: producer (*Catch-22*; *The Remains of the Day*) and a widely admired studio chief with tenures at Warner Bros, United Artists and Sony Pictures.
Tom Daly, 93: top producer with the National Film Board of Canada for more than 40 years (*City of Gold*; *My Financial Career*).
John Dunning, 84: producer and a leader in the Canadian film industry who mentored such filmmakers as David Cronenberg (*Rabid*) and Ivan Reitman (*Meatballs*).
Bernd Eichinger, 61: producer and writer who had success both in his native Germany (*Downfall*) and internationally (*The NeverEnding Story*).
David F. Friedman, 87: exploitation producer who helped pioneer the splatter film in the 1960s with *Blood Feast*, *Two Thousand Maniacs!* and *Color Me Blood Red*.
Richard Gordon, 85: producer of horror and sci-fi beginning in the 1950s (*Fiend Without a Face*; *Corridors of Blood*).
Polly Platt, 72: producer (*Broadcast News*) who had also had notable credits as a production designer (*The Last Picture Show*) and screenwriter (*Pretty Baby*).
Bert Schneider, 78: producer of a string of films that came to define the New Hollywood era. *See p.29*
Walter Seltzer, 96: veteran Hollywood publicist who turned to producing in the late 1950s (*Will Penny*; *Soylent Green*).
Hugh Stewart, 100: a film editor in the 1930s (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*), he made documentaries during WWII (*Tunisian Victory*), then produced the comedies of Norman Wisdom.
Laura Ziskin, 61: producer who broke ground for women in Hollywood and had several notable commercial smashes (*Pretty Woman*; the *Spider-Man* films).

Screenwriters

Gilbert Adair, 66: screenwriter (*The Dreamers*), novelist (*Love and Death on Long Island*), film critic (*Flickers*), translator and journalist. *See S&S February 2012*
Denis Cannan, 92: playwright who ventured into screenwriting (*The Beggar's Opera*; *Sammy Going South*).
Norman Corwin, 101: celebrated writer-producer of American radio who also wrote some film screenplays (*Lust for Life*).
Shelagh Delaney, 71: playwright who adapted her most famous work, *A Taste of Honey*, for the screen and wrote occasional film scripts including *Dance with a Stranger*.
David Zelag Goodman, 81: remarkably versatile screenwriter (*Lovers and Other Strangers*; *Straw Dogs*; *Logan's Run*).
Kevin Jarre, 56: as a screenwriter he tackled the US Civil War in *Glory* and the Old West in *Tombstone*.
Iakovos Kambanellis, 89: playwright whose screenwriting credits include some groundbreaking Greek films (*Stella*; *O Drakos*).
Hal Kanter, 92: scripted vehicles for Hope and Crosby (*Road to Bali*) and Martin and Lewis (*Artists and Models*), and helped adapt Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*.
Arthur Laurents, 93: playwright (*West Side Story*; *Gypsy*) and screenwriter (*Rope*).
David Rayfiel, 87: was noted for his long association with Sydney Pollack, both as a credited screenwriter (*Three Days of the Condor*) and an uncredited script doctor (*Out of Africa*).
Jimmy Sangster, 83: breathed new life into the horror genre through a series of scripts for Hammer (*The Curse of Frankenstein*; *Dracula*; *Taste of Fear*).

ZDENEK MILER

Animator
1921–2011

PRESS ASSOCIATION (1)

Artists who cater specifically for children are usually taken less seriously than their adult-oriented contemporaries: quite literally, their work is something that one grows out of. And yet when 'Bagpuss' animator Oliver Postgate, 'Vision On' artist Tony Hart and playwright Harold Pinter died within weeks of each other, the public reaction left no doubt as to which two had burrowed more deeply into Britain's collective psyche, for all Pinter's unarguable creative importance.

Zdenek Miler passed away between the centenaries of two of the founding fathers of Czech animation: Karel Zeman (2010) and Jirí Trnka (2012). A decade younger than either, Miler was much less of a formal innovator, being a cel animator in a long-established tradition. However, his films far outstripped theirs in popularity – indeed, until Aardman, Ghibli and Pixar came along, Miler's wide-eyed, red-nosed and human-handed Little Mole (Krtecek) was arguably the most globally famous animated character to emerge from a studio other than Disney.

That studio was Trick Brothers (Bratri v triku), founded in 1945 by a group of animators with Trnka as their head. After training as an illustrator, Miler had worked for the marketing department of Tomás Bat'a's shoe empire in Zlín, where he learned basic film technique. After joining Trick Brothers as a draughtsman, he made his directorial debut in 1948 with 'About a Millionaire Who Stole the Sun' ('O Milionari, Ktery Ukradl Slunce'), an animated folk tale with a Midas-style moral message.

The Little Mole first appeared a decade later, in 'How the Mole Got His Trousers' ('Jak Krtek ke Kalhotkám Prisel', 1957). Commissioned to make an educational short about the clothing industry, an unenthusiastic Miler took an inspiration-seeking walk, tripped over a molehill, and realised there was one species that animators had ignored.

From the mid-1960s to the early 2000s, Miler created over 50 Mole films. All were without dialogue, except for universally recognised words such as hello. Although he failed to crack the US market, the Mole's adventures were sold to over 80 countries, both capitalist and communist. The BBC frequently broadcast Miler's films in the 1970s, and they became an essential source of hard currency for the entire Czechoslovakian animation industry.

Despite feeling increasingly lukewarm towards the communist government that he had idealistically supported in the 1940s, Miler was never subversive in the tradition of Jan Svankmajer or even the Trnka of 'The Hand' ('Ruka', 1965), although he regularly poked gentle fun at two notorious Czech traditions: excessive bureaucracy and an abysmal environmental track record. His most prescient Mole film was 'The Mole and the Rocket' ('Krtek a Raketa', 1965), for Miler lived long enough to see an eight-inch plush Mole toy visit the international space station in July 2011, courtesy of a space-shuttle astronaut who married into a Czech family. Had it ventured further, this surrogate Mole might have encountered the Zdenekmiler asteroid, discovered by Czech astronomers in 1998, and a truly cosmic honour for someone whose work was conceived on such an intimate scale.
Michael Brooke

Jorge Semprún, 87: distinguished novelist who also wrote screenplays for Resnais (*La Guerre est finie*) and Costa-Gavras (*Z*).

Set & costume designers

Ray Aghayan, 83: costume designer whose gowns often evoked classic-era Hollywood glamour (*Lady Sings the Blues*; *Funny Lady*).
Theoni V. Aldredge, 88: influential Broadway costume designer whose film credits include 1974's *The Great Gatsby*, *Network* and *Moonstruck*.
Syd Cain, 93: production designer and art director (*Fahrenheit 451*; *Frenzy*) who also designed the sets and gadgets for several Bond movies.
Bruno Rubeo, 65: Italian-born production designer who worked in Hollywood (*Platoon*; *Driving Miss Daisy*).
Theadora Van Runkle, 83: costume designer whose work made a mark on popular fashion (*Bonnie and Clyde*; *The Thomas Crown Affair*; *The Godfather Part II*).

Sound & special effects

Gene S. Cantamessa, 80: sound mixer who worked with Spielberg (*E.T.*), Mel Brooks (*Young Frankenstein*) and Ivan Reitman (*Ghostbusters*).
Harry Redmond Jr, 101: special-effects artist at RKO in the 1930s (*King Kong*) who later went independent (Capra's *Lost Horizon*; Welles's *The Stranger*).
Bill Varney, 77: sound mixer who won Oscars for *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and worked on the restoration of *Touch of Evil*.
Frank Warner, 85: veteran sound editor (*Little Big Man*; *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; *Raging Bull*).

Miscellaneous

Marion Dougherty, 88: the doyenne of Hollywood casting directors (*Midnight Cowboy*; *The Sting*).
Eddie Fowlie, 89: known for his close association with David Lean as prop man, special-effects artist, location scout, stuntman and general problem solver.
Donald Krim, 65: championed foreign, independent and classic cinema as the long-time president of the US distributor Kino International.
Sue Mengers, 79: powerful Hollywood talent agent of the 1970s. *See p.30*
Takuo Miyagishima, 83: optical designer who was a key innovator of lenses and camera systems at Panavision for more than 50 years.
Eva Monley, 88: location and production manager valued by directors for her knowledge of Africa (*Exodus*; *Lawrence of Arabia*; *Out of Africa*).
Roland Petit, 87: French ballet choreographer-dancer briefly in Hollywood (*Hans Christian Andersen*) who later made the dance film *Black Tights*.
Peter Przygodda, 69: German film editor closely associated with Wim Wenders (*The American Friend*; *Paris, Texas*; *Wings of Desire*).
Robert Sklar, 74: film scholar whose most influential book was *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*.

MORE FEATURE OBITUARIES ONLINE Naman Ramachandran on Dev Anand | David Thompson on Yekaterina Golubeva | John Wrathall on John Barry and many more www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

Charting a medley of real lives in a decaying resort on California's inland Salton Sea, 'Bombay Beach' seems like a typical observational documentary – until its subjects start to dance. Director Alma Har'el talks **Nick Bradshaw** *through an eye-opening collaboration*

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

One hundred miles inland of Southern California's golden Pacific sands lies the Salton Sea, the Bear State's largest lake, filling some 500 square miles, from the Joshua Tree National Park and Coachella Valley to the Mexi-Cali borderlands of the Imperial Valley. Non-draining, this sometime oasis is nonetheless prone to evaporation, and its current incarnation only dates back to a flood-off from the Colorado River in 1905. Mid-century real-estate speculators tried to conjure an 'American Riviera' on the sea's shores, but were driven back by pollution and high salination.

Nowadays tourists visit the area to see Salvation Mountain, Leonard Knight's gaudily painted devotional adobe sculpture in the desert; economic fugitives venture to Slab City, a down-and-out encampment whose numbers have lately swelled thanks to its 2007 advertisement in Sean Penn's *Into the Wild*, and America's subsequent recession. And connoisseurs of American dilapidation and ruin sometimes come cast a glance at the Salton Sea's erstwhile colonies like Bombay Beach, a bare spore of a town on its eastern flank, five streets deep by nine avenues wide, population 300 and falling. Dead fish and rusted domestic effects litter the shoreline (see flickr.com/plaguesandplesures); half the town lives in trailer homes. In the absence of a petrol station, golf carts are the local transport of choice.

Expat Israeli music-video and commercials director Alma Har'el first scouted the town on an outing from the Coachella music festival, where she was trying to shoot some scenes with Zach Condon from the band Beirut for a video for the latter's song 'Concubine'. In the event her promo (you can see it at youtube.com/Almaharel) found much more poetry mixing and matching images of Condon around Los Angeles with a young unknown, Mike Parrish Jr, in the wilds of Bombay Beach – and Har'el had her ticket to her first feature documentary, *Bombay Beach*, a movie as joyously off the beaten track in formal terms as its subjects are feisty and unsinkable.

Har'el never set out with orthodox *vérité*-documentary motivations, she told me over a drink at last summer's Sheffield Doc/Fest, both of us somewhat buzzing at the time following an inspirational masterclass with Direct Cinema doyen Albert Maysles.

"I had the idea to make a film that had dance sequences in it," she explains. "Dance is one of the most interesting ways to get insight into somebody's soul and mood – a lot of things you see when people move, you never see when they just talk about their lives. But movies always feel the need to justify it. I didn't want that and thought a documentary would be perfect, because the people would be non-dancers and it would just be a way to explore something in their lives."

Second – but again, before stories – came mood. "You'd be surprised how little I knew when I set out to make it, except how I wanted it to look," Har'el admits. "I more or less knew the tone and feeling I was looking for. I knew I wanted to look into people and landscape, find images that tell stories and explore scenes with dance, but that's all. I didn't know anything about anybody in Bombay Beach, but guessed that if you lived there, then you've got to have an interesting story."

The characters she found certainly seem to bear that out. Complementing each other on various levels, though never too easily, they offer a spectrum of commentaries on American myths, dreams and realities. The eldest by some measure, Red is an octogenarian oil-field veteran and divorcee who now loves the ladies from a Slab City trailer, zips around the dunes on a quad bike and ekes his living reselling cigarettes bought from an untaxed Native American reservation. As Har'el says, he's "a real Marlboro Man", with his suspicion of the long-hairs and of racial interbreeding (on which principle he hasn't spoken to his daughter for half a century) – but most of all of modern American excess.

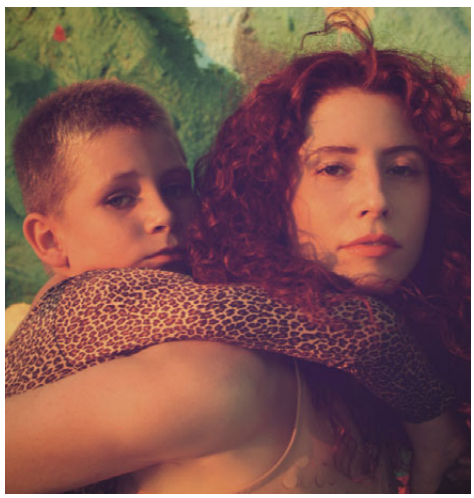
"Waste is something he can't comprehend," says Har'el. "For him that's the biggest disappointment with America – the fact that people don't remember what it's like when you have to survive with nothing. Coming from the Dust Bowl era and the Depression, he feels that being resilient and able to survive with nothing – enjoying the uncertainty of life – is a position of strength. There's a side to Red that wants to see people dealing again with that."

Something of a younger counterpart to Red in the movie – only slightly ironically – is CeeJay, a teenage black exile from Los Angeles whose eyes-on-the-prize dedication to his sporting potential (and, implicitly, to the American wager of commitment, reward and progress) has him on track for a college football scholarship, which would make him the first in his family to reach further education. Yet to make it CeeJay has had to reverse the hallowed rite of passage from small town to big city: he was sent to live with his

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHOTOGRAPH ALMA HAREL

'Dance is one of the most interesting ways to get insight into somebody's soul and mood'

MEET THE LOCALS
Clockwise from top: CeeJay dancing; 'Bombay Beach' director Alma Har'el with Benny Parrish; Red; Benny's father Mike Sr



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX HULSEY

father in the pointedly boring backwater of Bombay Beach after his 16-year-old brother was shot dead by Los Angeles gang rivals.

"I tried to capture what makes his character hard, because he is hard – he's survived a lot and he's very controlling of his environment and friends," says Har'el. "But I was very inspired by his strength and motivation: he followed through on everything he set out to do. Leaving Los Angeles for one of the most obscure ghost towns you could find – it was like the American Dream flip-flopped. And then to see him come through is like a parody." Even CeeJay's blossoming – and sweetly sketched – romance with a white girl, his friend's sister Jessie, scans as a marker of post-racist 'progress' and defiance of barriers.

Surprisingly, though, it's the family of Har'el's first discovery in the town, Mike Parrish Jr, who prove the most compelling subjects, particularly his parents Pamela and Mike Sr, and his younger brother Benny. Black-marked by the parents' past indiscretions and Benny's persisting hyperactivity, they're now living under the long arms of both the law and America's drug-happy medical system. High-school drop-outs, Pamela and Mike got together when she was just 13, and she was still under age when she had Sarah, the first of their children. Mike Sr was turned away from the army, so channelled his pyrotechnical urges into playing private militia with real firearms and a stockpile of explosives. Neither parent seemed to have any command of house-keeping or cleaning, and when the police came calling in the aftermath of 9/11, both were arrested and their three kids put into care.

Now all back under one roof, their dream is to live a 'normal' life. But Mike's criminal record precludes a good job, and as Pamela plaintively notes, outback life offers few recreations: "All we can do is go riding in the desert, shoot guns... but we can't do that any more." There's a touching scene in which she admits to Sarah – now almost the age at which Pamela had her – her hopes that Sarah won't follow in her footsteps. But you wonder about Benny, who we first meet newly grounded for having thrown rocks at a classmate. He starts his first day at a new school curled up in a shell throughout the Pledge of Allegiance, and shows world-weary patience in the face of a string of doctors whose preferred reaction to his diet of Ritalin, Resperiodol and lithium is "increase the dose". Asked by Pam what he's going to be when he grows up, this scrawny, buzz-cut kid with the permanent hollowed eyes bashfully jokes: "I'm going to be... a weirdo."

Dance fantasias

The first time we see a bunch of the Parrish kids and their mates shaking a limb on camera, it plays as a perfectly naturalistic piece of malarkey. It's not clear if the music (by Condon) is diegetic or not, and Har'el doesn't hide her flair for setting images to music – in fact the whole movie just *moves* beautifully, regardless of the score. But it takes a while to realise that she's also gone all Stanley Donen with her subjects. Even a montage of CeeJay and his friends jerk-dancing around some ruins, segueing gloriously into a full-on outdoor night party, betrays little directorial intervention

(though I doubt they were dancing to Beirut). But having seeded a sense of the film's musicality, Har'el elaborates ever bolder, purer dance fantasias: Benny acting out his sense of isolation amidst a crowd of the town's kids; CeeJay and Jessie performing their courtship rituals with the white masks that CeeJay seems to have taken up as an accessory; Benny as a moustachioed fireman driving a firetruck down an empty street.

(Red, unsurprisingly, doesn't put on his dancing shoes, but he is given a musical introduction set to Bob Dylan's 'Moonshiner' and another, after he recovers from a stroke, set to the same artist's 'Tomorrow Is a Long Time'. Complementing the film's musical diet of Beirut and Dylan, Red also leavens the soundtrack with his own seasoned adages: "You have to improvise in order to survive"; "Life is nothing but a habit anyway.")

"It was a very open feel, very free," Har'el says of her process. "I moved there on my own and just hung out with [the characters], filming them myself and doing whatever I felt like on the day, or what seemed right to bring out a certain feeling or story. Sometimes there were things I wanted to explore with the kids, so we'd go to some location, talk and improvise. And when a scene really struck me, I'd call up my choreographer and we'd rehearse a dance sequence as a commentary on it. I shot 160 hours of footage, and for two or three months we assembled everything, then started playing with the pieces like a puzzle. At the same time we'd follow up stories and go shoot more dance sequences. So it was very organic, like making a quilt, you know?"

The film's evidently constructed nature has nonetheless caused concern to some critics, who find the performed, collaborated-over scenes a distraction from the path of pure observation, or harbour suspicions of further, unconfessed inauthenticities in the documenting.

ALL WASHED UP
At the core of the film are the dysfunctional Parrish family, whose younger son Benny, above, tells his mum he's going to grow up to be a "weirdo"

"What's interesting is that the scenes that were purely observational often aren't the ones people think," says Har'el. She cites two examples: one an unlikely scene in which Jessie's ex-boyfriend turns up unannounced at a football game to try sexually blackmailing her into getting back together with him. ("He asked me to get out of there," Har'el recalls. "And I said, 'I'm not going to.' And he signed a release form right there and proceeded to have this whole conversation, which was very uncomfortable to watch – and unflattering to him. But it was interesting that somebody would put himself in that situation.") The other example is Pamela and Sarah's magic-hour heart-to-heart, the salient part of which emerged unexpectedly from a birds-and-the-bees talk Har'el had set up. ("It's a really intimate moment, but it didn't just happen.")

'I wanted to bring in my way of seeing the American Dream – the things I as a foreigner saw in that place'

As for the accusations of impurism, Har'el muses: "I think for some people there's something very sacred about the idea of documentary. Yet there's so much in between and around it, especially for people like me who've grown up surrounded by reality TV and all that stuff. I guess I was never really interested in keeping any of those rules [of documentary 'objectivity'] – not because I was against them, but just because I wasn't interested in thinking in those terms.

"It's weird," she says. "I keep finding younger and older people really respond to my film. They feel connected to the people's stories, but they also watch it as a film. It's people in the middle who've had the most problems with the concept of truth and what exactly went into the film – they wanted to be sure they weren't being cheated. Yet so many decisions go into everything when you make a documentary, from your choice of subjects to where you put the camera, your editing choices and music. Obviously everything is directed towards a certain narrative. And I didn't want to hide the fact that I was there, but [instead] bring in my own way of seeing childhood, desolation and the American Dream – all those things I as a foreigner saw in that place.

"That's what I'm interested in," she concludes: "those moments that are a collaboration between the filmmaker and subjects, with some authenticity in them but also made with the awareness that we're making a film and exploring their lives in a creative way."

■ *'Bombay Beach' is in cinemas now*

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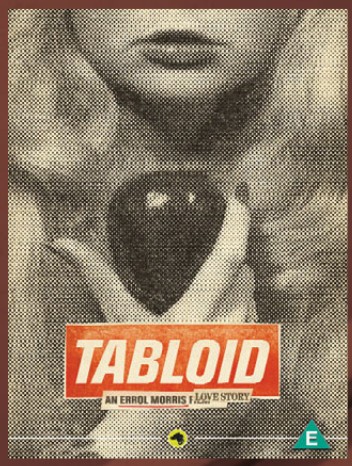
PRESENTS

OUT NOW



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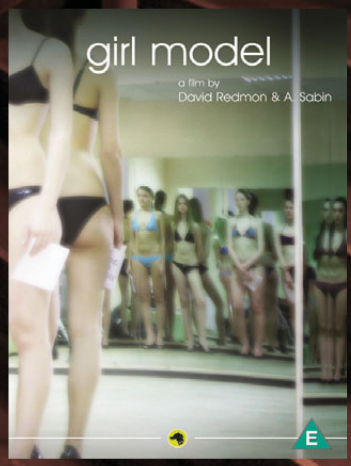

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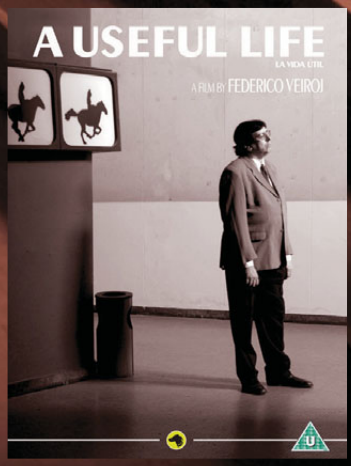

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Exploring the psychological fallout experienced by a young woman who's escaped from a cult, Sean Durkin's debut 'Martha Marcy May Marlene' marks him as one of the most exciting directors to emerge on the US indie scene in a while. He talks to **Jonathan Romney**

THE GETAWAY

STRAY WAIF
Martha (Elizabeth Olsen, right and opposite) stays with sister Lucy (Sarah Paulson, left) after escaping from the cult run by Patrick (John Hawkes, top)

It begins with an archetypal American idyll. Two men hammer at a fence, out in the yard, a goat tethered nearby; women hang washing; a small child toddles about. It could be footage from a lyrical documentary about young Americans, now or perhaps in the late 1960s, reliving the perennial Walden dream of backwoods self-sufficiency. But the dark side of the picture quickly emerges: indoors, women lay the table; then men eat, while the women silently wait their turn on the stairs. We see the inmates of this community huddled on mattresses on the floor of their claustrophobic quarters. Sweet home to some, perhaps, but not to the young woman who creeps away in the early morning – and is pursued through the woods, crouching in terror to hide from her housemates.

That's the beginning of *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, a controlled and quietly chilling feature debut by American writer-director Sean Durkin. The twee-sounding, singsong title refers to the various identities of the young protagonist, played by Elizabeth Olsen. The gauche and (we instantly sense) directionless Martha has somehow entered a rural community led by the charismatic, rough-hewn Patrick (John Hawkes).

On meeting Martha, Patrick says, "You look like a Marcy May." She doesn't yet realise that he's hereby renaming her, part of a process of stripping

the impressionable young woman of her identity, making her reject her previous life and mistrust her family – making her his creature. As for Marlene, that's the name the women in the group use when they answer the phone. Perhaps there once was a Marlene; if so, we dread to think what might have become of her.

After escaping the group's house in the Catskills, Martha winds up in the glassily opulent lakeside home of older sister Lucy (Sarah Paulson), who hasn't heard from her for two years and has no idea what she's been through. The film follows Martha's return to the world and her rehabilitation – which might not, in the long run, be a successful one. The wealthy, elegantly bourgeois, distinctly uptight Lucy and her husband Ted (Hugh Dancy) are baffled by Martha's unpredictable behaviour, but consistently fail to read the extent to which she's damaged. Anyone outraged, as Lucy is, by Martha's habit of swimming naked surely won't begin to understand why she's inclined to sleep on the floor, or curl up on Lucy and Ted's bed while they're having sex, or declare herself "a teacher and a leader."

At Lucy's, Martha begins to process her experience in the group; the film feels like a waking dream, as Martha – who spends much of her time asleep or smilingly incommunicative – relives fragments of memory. The film presents her life at the commune in a series of flashbacks, each abruptly triggered by events in the present. It's the cleanness of the jumps between time frames – brilliantly negotiated by editor Zachary Stuart-Pontier – that give the film its energy, and stop it from blurring into hazy indeterminacy. But the sense of lucid dreaming underwrites the entire film: it's there partly in Jody Lee Lipes's photography, washed out to suggest experiences viewed through a distancing gauze, and partly in the eerie ambient score by Saunder Jurriaans and Daniel Bensi.

The blissed-out benignity with which Martha is welcomed into the group soon reveals itself as facilitating the physical and psychic violence by which Patrick cements his community. We suddenly see her face down and profoundly out of it, being fucked by Patrick; afterwards, she's told by a female housemate that she's undergone a rich and transforming experience. Later we see Martha in turn helping initiate another newcomer by drugging and sweet-talking her too.

The sex ritual is one form of complicity that binds the group together; another is crime. The community supports itself partly by stealing, on local burglary raids led by Patrick's quietly menacing lieutenant (Brady Corbet, from *Melancholia* and Michael Haneke's US remake of *Funny Games*). These raids are shown in two sequences that have all the queasy tension of Haneke's original *Funny Games*, all the more so for being underplayed – which is why the outcome of the second raid comes as such a shock.

Outsider clan

The word 'cult' is never mentioned in *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, but it's all too clear that Patrick's outsider clan echoes those once commanded by the likes of David Koresh, Jim Jones and Charles Manson. Like those parodic messiahs, the soft-spoken Patrick has a death fixation; in a chillingly nonsensical bit of rhetoric – nihilism with a faux-Buddhist polish – he tells Martha, "You know that death is the most beautiful part of your life, right?... Death is pure love."

Sean Durkin 'I love 70s American cinema, which is entirely European-influenced. Those films are so loose and so flawed – they raise questions'

Like Manson – who was a songwriter, or at least managed to persuade The Beach Boys' Dennis Wilson that he was one – he also has a way with a tune. In a memorable scene, Patrick – who, as incarnated by Hawkes, resembles Bruce Springsteen on hunger strike – charms the newly renamed Martha with a song supposedly just for her. In fact it's 'Marcy's Song', written by the late Jackson C. Frank, an associate of Paul Simon, and included on his 1965 album. As performed by Patrick, this sweet, contemplative number becomes at once coy and sinister in its reduction of its love object to a lifeless image: "Well, she's just a picture." Frank's starker 'Marlene', played over the end credits, is no less unsettling.

A bracing anomaly among American independent films, *Martha Marcy May Marlene* is marked by a distinctive tone of uncertainty and ellipsis. Martha's recollections may be unreliable – sometimes, she says, "you can't tell memory from dream." And we don't know whether the group really have let Martha go, or whether they're on her trail – or, indeed, whether signs of their presence nearby are really her paranoid imaginings. The film ends with startling abruptness, in a manner that suggests that Durkin has been studying Michael Haneke very closely (see interview below).

The film is a revelation on several counts. It introduces us to the very controlled directing and writing of Durkin, an NYU graduate who founded his company BorderLine Films together with producer Josh Mond and producer-director Antonio Campos, whose own 2008 debut feature *Afterschool* was a chilly, Egoyanesque contemplation of YouTube-era alienation. The company's next film is Campos's Paris-set *Simon Killer*, with Corbet again and Mati Diop, from Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum*.

Durkin's film is equally a revelation of its actors: notably British actor Hugh Dancy, deliciously evoking Ted's self-satisfied intolerance; Sarah Paulson, who calmly hints at the carefully concealed wounds in Lucy's own psyche; and above all near-newcomer Elizabeth Olsen, sister to and visual spit of those erstwhile twin princesses of US teen culture, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen. Eerily luminous as she evokes Martha's delicate, exalted and deceptive blankness, she achieves a remarkable evocation of anger and defiance beneath an otherworldly shell.

Jonathan Romney: I came out of 'Martha Marcy May Marlene' thinking of something Martha says in the film: "There was confusion." That seems to define both her state of mind and the tone of the film.

Sean Durkin: While I was writing, I read about this girl who escaped from a group, just after they turned violent. She was waiting at a bus stop and the leader of the group tracked her down and sat with her and gave her money and wished her well – rather than threatening her and bringing her back, which is what you'd expect. I thought that was the most frightening thing. Then she disappeared, and I wondered where she went. And that's when I decided to focus on what happened to Martha when she left.

I started to talk to people who'd been through similar things, and one woman told me about her first couple of weeks [after leaving her group]. She was in a foreign country, they'd taken her passport, she had no way to get her documents, and she was staying in different hotels. She [later] blocked out most of that time. All she could remember was she was lying to everyone about where she'd been, and she was paranoid that she was seeing the leader of the group everywhere. I just imagined this state of confusion. It's confusing on so many levels, because the group told you your old life is bad, [and] now you're back going towards your old life, not knowing if it's right or wrong. There's nothing but confusion.

JR: What affects the whole film is the sense that once Martha is back in her former life, suddenly she's forgotten everything she's been through. It's as if she's waking from a dream, or some extreme case of jet lag.

SD: Totally. I've never been through anything like this, but the way I found to relate to it was things like that. It's like that moment when you awake from a really deep sleep and you don't know where you are, or if you've been travelling or working. If you've been on a film shoot, there are days when you wake up in your own bed and you don't know where you are.

JR: Yet the film has an absolute clarity to it – you don't try to duplicate Martha's confusion.

BREAKTHROUGH AMERICAN INDIE DIRECTORS

Hot young American indie directors may no longer be household names the way they were in the 1990s heyday of Miramax and Sundance, but here **James Bell** *and* **Isabel Stevens** *select eight up-and-comers to watch:*

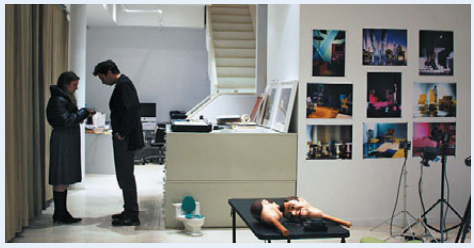
Antonio Campos
Afterschool (2008)

Sean Durkin co-produced Antonio Campos's unnerving debut – a cool, Haneke-esque look at a troubled, video- and media-obsessed high-school student (Ezra Miller). Campos's follow-up *Simon Killer* recently premiered to acclaim at Sundance.

Damien Chazelle
Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench (2009)

Shot on black-and-white 16mm, Chazelle's thesis film – a Boston-set romance – channels the spirit of Cassavetes and the French New Wave. While Harvard labelled it 'incomplete', critics raved about the mumblecore-musical hybrid.

Lena Dunham
Tiny Furniture (2010)



25-year-old Dunham followed a handful of witty shorts with this sharp, largely autobiographical debut, and found herself compared favourably to Woody Allen and Tina Fey. She's now at work on *Girls*, a Judd Apatow-produced series for HBO.

Bradley Rust Gray
The Exploding Girl (2009)

Rust Gray's low-key romance about an epileptic Ivy League student (Zoe Kazan, granddaughter of Elia) at home in New York for spring break moves past mumblecore to find its own aesthetic. His follow-up *Jack and Diane* is due later this year.

Julia Loktev
The Loneliest Planet (2011)

Loktev's second feature swaps the would-be suicide bomber in New York of her debut *Day Night Day Night* for a backpacking couple (including Gael García Bernal) in the Caucasus. But the sense of suspense is still palpable.

David Robert Mitchell
The Myth of the American Sleepover (2010)

Michigan-born Mitchell's warm and nostalgic debut has something of the same 'hanging-out' vibe as Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused*. It follows a group of teenagers over the course of one summer evening in the pre-cellphone 1990s.

Matt Porterfield
Putty Hill (2010)

Porterfield's piercing second feature, like his debut *Hamilton* (2006), was shot in his hometown of Baltimore, and deftly melds documentary and fiction to tell its story of a group of family and friends assembled for the funeral of a teenager.

Ben and Joshua Safdie
Go Get Some Rosemary (aka *Daddy Longlegs*) (2009)

The Safdie brothers' startling film about a screwed-up, divorced father (Ronald Bronstein) and his relationship to his two sons earned rave reviews from J. Hoberman and others. Watch out for a scene-stealing cameo from Abel Ferrara.

CULTURE SHOCK
Martha's memories of life in the cult, top, are intercut with her comedown in the uptight home of Lucy, below left, and her husband Ted (Hugh Dancy, below right)

SD: I never tried to be tricky. I don't like films with flashbacks, I don't like films that play tricks. So I never thought of it like that. To me, her emotional journey is linear. I thought it was literally what she was going through emotionally, in a very straightforward way.

JR: You don't use the word 'cult' in the film. We have an idea what a cult is – and this isn't necessarily it. It comes across more as a community, or an anti-community outside society.

SD: That was one of the reasons I wanted to make the film: I wanted it to be a modern-day, naturalistic look at what a group like this is. The word 'cult' is so dangerous, because you cannot define what a cult is. I did a lot of research, but then I started from scratch. I said, "OK, this is the place where it happens. Who moves there? How many people? How does it work? Who starts to become the leader?" It's this community, and then a line is crossed when one person starts using all these so-called good values for his own benefit.

JR: It's interesting the way the soundtrack uses 1960s songs by Jackson C. Frank. They're sweet songs, but in the film they come across as sinister.

SD: I always try to find ways to show an emotion without having to hear someone talk. I thought playing a song named after Martha – supposedly named after her – would be the way to do it. They're rather beautiful songs, but they're very painful too, underneath the surface. How I discovered that album was quite crazy. I'd named the film four years earlier, and two months before we were shooting, I was looking for songs with the names Martha, Marcy and Marlene – and I get the album, and 'Marcy's Song' and 'Marlene' are back to back on an album recorded in the mid-60s!

JR: The title 'Martha Marcy May Marlene' sounds precious at first – you must have thought people might be put off.

SD: To be honest, I never realised it would be such an issue until I started sending it out, and then I realised, "Oh yeah, that's kind of confusing." People would read it and say, "Love the script – gotta change the title." I said, "Please, just suggest..." And no one ever suggested another title, ever.

JR: The moment when group leader Patrick (John Hawkes) renames Marcy is fascinating. It comes across as a cute, benign gesture, but we soon realise it's an act of violence: "I've renamed you, I own you."

SD: You read about all kinds of groups and that seems to be the first step across the board, renaming – the first step in losing your old identity. It's a very subtle step, and I guess it's effective.

JR: The sexual ritual of having to sleep with Patrick – the so-called rite of passage – is an act of violence that the group disguises as an act of generosity, supposedly helping the novice to another life. It's incredibly sinister, but you handle it very delicately.

SD: Some of the stories you hear about that sexual-initiation phase were so troubling that if you put them in a movie, people wouldn't believe it. I always knew that, the way I shot [the scene], it was never going to be about the sex – it was going to be about Martha's reaction. I wanted it to feel like she was stuck in a coffin. For me, the violent acts are not the worst part, but what follows them – there's always someone there to hold your hand and tell you why it's OK, and manipulate you. And those are the most horrifying stories I heard, about how people did that and built the trust.

JR: Tell me about the casting of the sisters. Elizabeth Olsen, who plays Martha, has this very fresh ingénue quality – partly, I suppose, by association with her family (as sister of erstwhile teen stars Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen). Whereas Sarah Paulson's Lucy has a tough look of someone who's been through things in her own life.

SD: My casting director Susan Shopmaker is amazing. She handpicked a lot of the cast. The one role we wanted to cast an unknown was Martha. Lizzie [Olsen] was just one of 50-plus people who came in. I didn't want anyone until I saw her – and then on her first audition I knew something was right. She was the only one for the role in my mind.

I've been a big fan of Sarah [Paulson] for years. I liked her in *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*, which was an Aaron Sorkin [TV] show. I wanted sibling relationships to be as much a part of the movie as the cult stuff. They're equally damaged, they've just dealt with it in different ways.

JR: Your film is very elliptical, and you give us next to no backstory about the sisters. In that sense, it doesn't feel typically American at all, but rather European. The film feels somewhat Austrian, in fact.

SD: That's funny. I think it's very American in the sense of being about a New England family and how they communicate, or don't communicate. And the landscape is very specific. But there's definitely a European influence in the films that I like. I also love 70s American cinema, which is entirely European-influenced. That whole period was so incredible. Those were my favourite films and my favourite style. Those films are so loose and so flawed – they raise questions. Now there's so much stress on having the perfect movie, perfect structure, perfect tie-up, and it's really annoying.

My favourite directors are Polanski, Altman, Haneke, Eric Rohmer, so it's a mix. I've had a few key films in my life – the first was *The Shining* when I was 12. The other pivotal point was seeing *Code Unknown*. I was about 21, and all of a sudden I watched that film and saw just how much tension Haneke creates without crossing a line. The scene with Juliette Binoche on the train in that film – the air it creates, the anticipation of fear and something bad about to happen...

JR: Was it important for you that we shouldn't know what happens at the end of your film – or was it also that you don't know either?

SD: I don't know either. The film is Martha's journey, and she's going to be looking over her shoulder. It came from trying to be true – not thinking about how a film needs to conclude, but, "Where is a person who goes through this sort of thing *at* after three weeks?" The goal is to create questions, so that the questions the audience is asking are the same ones that Martha's asking.

'Martha Marcy May Marlene' is released on 3 February, and is reviewed on page 72

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BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

As our ten-yearly poll to find the Greatest Film of All Time gets ever closer, **B. Kite** *considers David Lynch's 'Mulholland Dr.' in the light of the Vedanta-inspired spiritual philosophy that underpins all the director's work*

REMAIN IN LIGHT

Despite the accusations of incoherence sometimes made against them by critics who ought to know better, the films of David Lynch seem to share a remarkably consistent cosmogony that can be sketched as follows: the soul originates in light and unity and has its home there. Although this unity can never in fact be divided, the soul takes on the guise of individual identity, or separateness, and enters the theatre of the world. Once in place, it often forgets its origins and mistakes its role for its being or, in dim intervals of recollection, believes itself so soiled by violence or dark multiplicities of desire that it imagines itself isolate, forever drifting, alone and homeless. But that is the ultimate illusion, and the bleakest. The soul's essence remains untouched and untouchable, and after however many cycles of rebirth its eventual homecoming is assured, has happened, is perpetually happening. It only remains for the soul to wake up in order to realise it never left. Nearly every Lynch film has a happy ending.

Some of the movies show a full revolution of this cycle (*Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Inland Empire*), some show only a portion (*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, *Mulholland Dr.*), and some none at all (*Dune*, *Blue Velvet*, *Wild at Heart*, *The Straight Story*). But even in this latter category it's present by reference and implication: think of Sandy's dream in *Blue Velvet* (1986); the repeated injunction "the sleeper must awaken" in *Dune* (1984); or the *Wizard of Oz* conclusion of *Wild at Heart* (1990). (Indeed, the above sketch could easily be reworded into a plot summary of *The Wizard of Oz* – the film if not the book – which may account for the frequent references to it in Lynch's work.)

Lynch is, in short, a religious or spiritual artist in the same loosely categoric sense that one might apply the term to William Blake or Tarkovsky, and the fact that this goes so often unrecognised by critics may be because the religion in question isn't Christianity. It's basically the Indian Vedanta, with an admixture of the somewhat cartooned gnosticism that Harold Bloom once hypothesised underlay every example of "the American religion".

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES
Laura Elena Harring as Rita (aka Camilla) in 'Mulholland Dr.', above, arguably the greatest achievement of director David Lynch, opposite

The vision is essentially monist, but representations of superficial dualism – and of the corrupt gnostic demiurge – recur in a number of films. Fire is his sign and insects are his agents: in *Eraserhead* (1976) 'Man in the Planet' – the guy who yanks the gears that set the whole clanking machinery of creation in motion – sits by a window, brooding and badly burned. In *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) the clacking of mandibles grows louder as the camera approaches "the one who's behind all this" – the charbroiled hobo behind the dumpster. The opening of Lynch's films are often encapsulated creation myths: *Blue Velvet*'s offers a geologic cross-section of this dualist tendency – here, the lawn and there, the bugs.

Something about that road in particular

Mulholland Dr. holds a peculiar position within Lynch's body of work. A greater commercial and critical success than any film he'd made since *Blue Velvet*, it's also more overtly marked by the (commercial) conditions of its making than anything else he's been involved with – indeed it's structured in response to them. It was initially commissioned as a pilot by ABC Television, then rejected for unspecified reasons. An infusion of French money allowed Lynch ten additional days of shooting, provided he could find some way to wrap the dangling story threads together. And the film as it stands bears every mark of those divisions, running about two thirds pilot, one third new material.

It's hard to ignore this split, since the two sections move so differently – and especially since the first moves exactly like a TV pilot, throwing out a new plot strand and group of characters every ten minutes or so. This was undoubtedly a factor in its greater popularity, since the pilot material offers a friendlier welcome than much of Lynch's recent work and the completed film also suggests a tidier, puzzle-box structure – a mystery contained within comfortable, explicable parameters as opposed to the disconcerting tendency of both earlier and later films to open out into the cosmos.

Holding the pose

The space between worlds is theatrical, some sort of stage set, because it's here that the conditions of life flatten into representation and its motions are distilled into an essential form or substance. "Give me your garmonbozia," says 'Man from Another Place' in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), and the subtitles helpfully gloss this term as "pain and suffering". A lifetime's production of pain and suffering is equivalent to a mid-sized bowl of creamed corn in both volume and texture, we discover, as it splatters across the Red Room's zigzag floor. These entities appear to feed on strong emotion – for Lynch, as for Rilke, we are the bees of the invisible. Earth is "a learning world", Lynch told author Greg Olson, and the curriculum appears heavily weighted towards the twinned subjects of suffering and love.

Such distillation to essence and attraction to extremes, in a slightly less severe form, might also serve to characterise the various modes of Lynchian performance. He's singularly brave and direct in his approach to heightened emotion, which makes him a rare creature in a modern movie menagerie that generally prefers to peer into such areas through thickets of irony. His approach is stylised but not mocking, though his proclivity for searching for new tones through the contrast of disjunctive elements – say Deputy Andy's crying fit on the discovery of Laura Palmer's body in the *Twin Peaks* pilot (1990) – frequently lands somewhere hard to peg. He seems to draw a frame around each beat and hold it in place for independent observation for a moment before moving on.

The pauses get stretched even further in some of Lynch's more single-mindedly comic modes, though even here the emphasis on discomfort and infirmity – the way the duration is prolonged by highlighting the strain of motion – teases the edge of excruciating. (Sticking with *Twin Peaks*, think of the way Lynch chose to start the second season by opening small eternities in the interactions of Agent Cooper, bleeding to death on the floor of his hotel room, and the world's oldest bellboy.) Both the slowness and the strain remind me a great deal of Laurel and Hardy (though as far as I know Lynch has never expressed any particular fondness for them). But Laurel and Hardy viewed under specific circumstances – on TV, where the absence of audience reaction leaves the pauses hanging strangely suspended in bouncy music.

And you were there, and you, and you

'Figuring out' *Mulholland Dr.* became something of a game on the film's initial release, with consensus gradually settling on an interpretation that posits that the long first section of the movie, with Naomi Watts as bright-eyed Betty, is nothing more than the guilty dream of Watts's sullen, heartbroken Diane, after having paid a hitman to have her former lover Camilla (Laura Elena Harring) snuffed.

It's fine as far as it goes – Lynch has planted enough *Oz*-ish cameos and references in the wrap-up to make the reading tenable. But under it the movie feels a little lumpy, as if the proliferating subplots were really retained just because Lynch happened to like the scene or felt some loyalty to the performer and devised excuses afterwards. It seems a stretch to believe that of the director who said of *Fire Walk with Me*: "We had to cut a lot of scenes we shot because they didn't fit with the rest of the story. I was sorry that I couldn't use everybody again, but you have to admit that many of the

ALTERNATE WORLDS
Clockwise from top: Club Silencio; Betty (Naomi Watts) with Rita (Laura Elena Harring); the "charbroiled hobo" behind the dumpster at Winkie's

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (3)

people of Twin Peaks didn't have a direct connection with the death of Laura Palmer." Those excisions made *FWWM*'s Twin Peaks a much chillier place than viewers of the TV show were expecting, stripping anything resembling ingratiating detail from the story in favour of one of the most relentlessly grim plot trajectories imaginable. The conclusion was in place from the start: Laura Palmer would be raped and murdered. All viewers could do was follow her down – and at the time of the film's release, few cared to make the trip.

It would have been relatively easy to streamline *Mulholland Dr.* along a similar track, but I don't think Lynch's decision not to do so was a failure of nerve; I think it might be because his notions of the relations between dream and reality may be more complicated than the prevailing interpretation allows.

I'm in your house

Lynch introduced screenings of *Inland Empire* (2006) with a quote from the Upanishads: "We are like the spider. We weave our life and then move along in it. We are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives in the dream. This is true for the entire universe." The world of Lynch's films is created by consciousness, striated by POVs from figures major and minor sending their vision outwards as if knitting the space in tandem, subject to fluctuations and surges due to the momentary intrusions from parallel radiations of outside consciousness.

Rather than stable positions, all of these worlds are overlapping fields, and the seeming dominance of any one is a matter purely – relativistically – of which clusters of consciousness the film happens to orbit. As Lynch told Peter Henne of *Film Journal International*, "You know, films are a world within a world. And maybe it's a world within a world within a world – within another world. It's a really beautiful thing how lost we are, and we want to get even more lost sometimes."

Since each of these worlds is simultaneously present, the spaces of Lynch's films are consistently trembling with immanence and humming under the pressure of another space potentially asserting itself. The drones and thrumming reverberations with which Lynch likes to line his environments also serve to remind the viewer of his or her own peculiar interiority, like the ringing in the ears that asserts itself when one is alone in a silent room. The central mystery of Lynch's work lies in this tension, the perpetual folding between outside and inside.

No hay banda

The Club Silencio sequence of *Mulholland Dr.* lays down the movie's operative metaphors: recording and synchronisation. With recording, an action once performed is always available and potentially present, while synchronisation is a matter of matching the movements. But the sequence places special attention on moments of *de*-synchronisation, when the movements break away – the trumpeter lifts his horn from his lips, the singer collapses – yet the song continues. Following this line allows us to briefly trace another story that the film may be telling, one that to my mind makes more sense of its shape.

Betty and Adam lock eyes in some shared awareness of alternate outcomes. It only lasts a moment, and then she's shunted back on course

It begins after death, as Diane is forced to re-experience her actions and their repercussions in what Tibetan Buddhism calls the bardo state. But at the moment of Camilla's execution, Diane's consciousness jerks back, forestalling the moment with a crashing car, and thus desynchronising her karmic record. With this new-found freedom from consequence, her consciousness extends centrifugally, spinning a new world and a new self, re-allocating figures to new plotlines. The job, then, for whatever agents of order the universe may possess, becomes to desynchronise this dream in turn and bring it back in line with the initial recording. Under this interpretation, the film doesn't split between a dream and a reality, but offers instead two realities – or, to paraphrase the Winkie's patron who suffers a run-in with the dumpster demon, the same dream twice.

Standing in the doorway

Angels and demons make occasional appearances in Lynch's work, but his pantheon more typically consists of figures of ambiguous aspect, standing just this side or the other of the space between worlds. Entities of the threshold and the margin, these cowboys, log ladies, decrepit waiters, giants, little men in big suits, eccentric neighbors, magicians and crack addicts share certain traits, one of which is an alienation from language. Their every utterance seems to emerge from a shared consciousness that finds words at once too abstract and too limiting, as if time and the material world that gave rise to speech operate on precepts foreign to them. Hints, warnings and encouragements are translated through gesture, metaphor and slightly skewed banalities. Those who would follow such admonitions are required to adopt similarly associational thinking.

The threshold entities speak a language that provokes association without binding the listener to any directed intent. Lynch has spoken of how the incidental conjunction of a few words ("deep river," "lost highway") is enough in itself to "set [him] dreaming". In other contexts, he has spoken of how certain denotative uses of language shut off vision by setting up blocks of pre-fab meaning in front of the complicated wonders before his eyes ("rotting cat carcass"). To make the juncture especially severe, one might say that in Lynch's films any speech that isn't direct affirmation ("Damn fine coffee!") or dreaming within language is either an act of aggression or a risky step into a field that's likely land-mined.

Here, as elsewhere, one can find the basic operations already at play in *Eraserhead*:
MR X (conversationally, forcefully): "Well Henry, what do you know?"
HENRY (recoiling): "Uh... I don't know much of anything."

This is the girl

One of the great attractions of this reading of *Mulholland Dr.*, is the way it reconfigures some of the film's sinister criminal elements – the Castigliane brothers, Mr Roque – into thug angels or perhaps the karma police. Their mission is to desynch Diane's dream by undermining a key stage in its trajectory: Betty's audition for the director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux). The two lock eyes in some shared awareness of alternate outcomes, but it only lasts a moment, and then she is shunted back on course – back to the bungalow that pins the twinned realities, and a confrontation with her own corpse that gradually unspools the world she has built.

It may still be that two of Diane/Betty's wishes were granted: Rita/Camilla was forced to see her dead body – and later, at Club Silencio, to experience her sadness, distilled into song. At least one of them seems a pretty nasty and vindictive wish, but Lynch at this point is unwilling to judge.

The blue box opens and the universal mechanism slides into synch as the Cowboy pokes his head through the door: "Hey pretty girl. Time to wake up."

A David Lynch retrospective plays at BFI Southbank, London until 29 February

INKING THE DEAL

The cult movie of 1984, complete with Iggy Pop theme song and Robby Müller photography, 'Repo Man' marked the debut of British writer-director Alex Cox. But before it was ever a screenplay or Cox's UCLA thesis project, it started out as a comic strip, reproduced this month for the first time with Masters of Cinema's Blu-ray release of the film.

STREET SMARTS
In 'Repo Man', young punk Otto (Emilio Estevez, left, with gun) learns the car-repossession code from veteran Bud (Harry Dean Stanton, far left)

SURE IS A LONG RIDE TO SAN PEDRO. JUST TO LOOK FOR SOME PUNK GYPSY. MUSTA BEEN NINE TIMES BY NOW
S'GET SOME ORANGES!
FUCK THAT SHIT, MAN. ORANGES. IF I HAD TO DO WHAT THOSE DUDES DO I'D PUT RAZOR BLADES IN 'EM. ORANGES!
HEY, KOOL!
ORDINARY PEOPLE. HOW I HATE 'EM! ORDINARY PERSON SPENDS HIS LIFE AVOIDING TENSE SITUATIONS. Y'KNOW?
YUP.
BEEP BEEP
REPO MAN, ON THE OTHER HAND, SPENDS HIS LIFE GETTING INTO 'EM — FUCKIN' ASSHOLE!!
HARBOR KING
...DIDN'T EVEN HEAR ME. STOP OFF FOR A CLUB, EH? FORE WE HIT THE FREEWAY...
TENSE SITUATIONS, KID. WHEN YOU HAVE 4 OR 5 A WEEK OR 3 OR 4 A DAY, GETS TO THE POINT IT DON'T MEAN NOTHING. A PACK OF MARLBOROS.
HUSTLER
NEED A BAG?
I'VE SEEN MEN STABBED. DIDN'T MEAN SHIT. GUNS DON'T MEAN SHIT EITHER. THAT'S WHEN YOU GOT TO WATCH YOURSELF.
POLLEZI
GURLZ
THERE'S GONNA BE SOME BAD SHIT COMING DOWN. CATCH THESE DUDES WITH THEIR PANTS DOWN — WHAAA?
QUICKLY, ACE. READ ME THE LICENSE ON THAT GREEN CHEVVY COIN' THE OTHER WAY.
NO RIDERS
UH... CHEVVY... AH... ITT 736. WHAT IS IT, RAY?

IT'S THE RODRIGUEZ BROTHERS!
VWV-! ROOM. KAR-BAM!
SCREE
CRASH
EEEEEEEEEE
SHATTER
BAPO KRAK
SCREECH
EVERYTHING OKAY
KEY: (A) RAY MAKES HARD LEFT TURN THRU CENTRAL DIVIDER; (B) SEVERAL SMALL IMPORTS COLLIDE & BURN; (C) PETERBILT REAR-ENDS PINTO; (D) RENTED BUS CONTAINING CHURCH CHOIR IS RUN OFF ROAD; (E) UNOBSERVANT COP.
RODRIGUEZ BROS
RAY'S CAR
BEEP!! BEEP!!
ACCELERA, NAPO.
SI.

WOW! WILLYA TAKE A LOOK AT THAT!! MUST BE SIXTEEN CAM'N'-TURBOED WITH A DOUBLE-HEADER'N'BINELLI SHOCKS T'SAY NOTHING OF THE CARMEN GHIA TRIM'N' BLAUPUNKT MK II ANTENNA'N' WHAT LOOKS LIKE GENUINE SILVER FOX FUR INTERIOR UPHOLSTERY ALTHOUGH THEY MAKE A PRETTY FAIR IMITATION...
...WHERE'D THEY GO!
$@!%$!!?
FUGGIN' GYPSIES. MAKES ME MEGA-MAD THE WAY THEY TAKE A PERFECTLY ADEQUATE JUNKER WON'T GO MORE THAN 85 AN' SOUP IT UP SO I CAN'T CATCH IT. SHIT!
BETTER GET ANOTHER CLUB
$3.75, PLEASE
CLUB
SO... WHO ARE THESE RODRIGUEZ BOYS, RAY?
THE RODRIGUEZ BROTHERS, STU, ARE TWO NOTORIOUS DELINQUENTS, CURRENTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR AT LEAST THIRTY VEHICLES IN THE FIELD.
TRW
NAME: LAZARO RODRIGUEZ
ADDRS: 7221 STATE
VEHICLE: DODGE DART
THIRTY CARS? HOW DID THEY MANAGE THAT??
ALL TOO EASY, KID — TOO GODDAMN EASY. THE WAY THEY GOT THIS COUNTRY SET UP...
MAKES ME MAD!
$488, $484, $490, $491, ALMOST THERE!
THESE BOYS BUY A $500 JUNKER & THEY PAY IT OFF ON TIME. NOW THEY GOT A CREDIT RECORD.
NEXT THING YOU KNOW IT'S MASTER CHARGE & VISA AND THEY'RE PULLING OUTTA THERE IN AN '83 LE BARON!

...AND THAT'S THE LAST THE DEALER SEES OF 'EM. THREE MISSED PAYMENTS LATER, THEY'RE A JOB FOR REPOMAN.
THE FIENDS!
YOU MAKING FUN OF ME?
WHY, NO.
WELL THAT'S GOOD, KID, BECAUSE IT ISN'T FUNNY. I CAN'T ABIDE SOMEONE THAT DOESN'T MAKE HIS PAYMENTS. CREDIT IS A SACRED TRUST THAT SHOULDN'T BE ABUSED. I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND.
HELL, RAY. THEY'RE JUNGLE BUNNIES. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?
RIGHT TURN
WAP!
OW!! RAY!! MY FACE... MMMM...
THOUGHT I HEARD AN ASSHOLE TALKING. WEIRDEST THING...
MEANWHILE, ON ALAMEDA STREET
CLANG CLANG
ACME FREIGHT
ACME FREIGHT
ACME PARK
NAPO RODRIGUEZ IS CHECKING ON HIS CARS
22, 23...
HEY, NAPO — FREEZE!
WHILE ON THE FREEWAY —
GOT A LONG NIGHT AHEAD OF US — LAGUNA BEACH, ENCINO, ARCADIA —
NOT ME, RAY. I'M OFF TO SEE THE NORTH CENTRAL VAN NUYS GAY YOUNG MEN'S STRING QUARTET IN HOLLYWOOD
NORTH CENTRAL VAN NUYS
GAY!!!
YOUNG MENS STRING QUARTET SLATED SAT??
OUTTA MY CAR Y'LITTLE QUEER!
BUT RAY — IT'S JUST A JOKE — WE'RE ON THE FREEWAY MAN! AAA-AEEE?
TO BE CONTINUED...

More than just one of the most beautiful actresses in movies, Gene Tierney didn't so much act as embody the mysterious heroines of three unforgettable 40s films. By **Dan Callahan**

ONLY A DREAM

Laura is more talked about than seen in the first quarter of the 1944 film that bears her name. She has supposedly been murdered, blown away by a shotgun at close range – the kind of blast that destroys a beautiful face beyond all recognition. Mainly, Laura exists as a painting in her apartment that hovers over the detective investigating her murder, a close-lipped type who soon develops a kind of obsession with the dead girl. But then she reappears... and who is she, exactly? Why is everyone in the film so taken with her? Because she is so beautiful, is that all?

Jennifer Jones had turned down the title role in *Laura* – or rather her husband and Svengali, David O. Selznick, had turned it down for her. After reading the script, Gene Tierney had her doubts about it too. Tierney was one of the most beautiful women in movies, but she wondered if she was beautiful enough to play Laura, or embody her. She thought it was a role for Hedy Lamarr – an unquestioned, basically static beauty. Tierney's own beauty was also somewhat static, except for certain moments when her eyes would flicker with something close to instability. She was like an exquisite porcelain doll with a hairline crack in it, a flaw, or a missing component.

Tierney's wide-set green eyes were made for the Technicolor process used at Twentieth Century-Fox, which is where she made most of her films. She was clever enough to marry a gifted playboy fashion designer, Oleg Cassini, who often dressed her on screen (the credits would read, "Costumes for Miss Tierney executed by Oleg Cassini"). A mix of the American girl next door and a more Asiatic beauty, Tierney suggested a debutante who might be wearing a sarong under her evening gown. Her nose and mouth were small, and she had an overbite that a childhood dentist refused to correct because he said it might change the shape of her mouth. She was a perfect beauty in a way that could be overwhelming, but a beauty with an overbite – a beauty hiding problems beneath her lacquered, placid surface.

When Tierney accepted the role in *Laura*, Rouben Mamoulian was the director. But under Mamoulian, nothing seemed to go right with the shoot – down to the all-important portrait of Laura, which had been painted by Mrs Mamoulian. And so producer Otto Preminger insinuated himself into a difficult situation and – after getting the go-ahead from studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck – made himself the director. Preminger had a photo taken of Tierney, and then had paint applied directly to the photo, so that the painting of Laura looked down from the wall as both real and not real – as both photographed and painted, both there and purely imagined. When we see Laura in flashbacks, waspish columnist Waldo Lydecker (Clifton Webb) says that she had "innate breeding", and that's true of Tierney, who had a wealthy upbringing and a finishing-school education. (Just listen to the way she pronounces "fiancée" as "fi-awn-cée", with the emphasis on the first syllable.)

Tierney's Laura is a doll that the gay Waldo likes to dress up, and she could be anything: she's an object of conversation and gossip in Manhattan drawing rooms, a beauty like Slim Keith or Babe Paley, a bauble meant to shine and give off reflected light. When she enters the movie in the present tense, very much alive, Tierney stands there in a white hat that seems to melt down on her head (the hat seems to be swooning for her) and she's... a blank. A blank that you can read anything onto, though there is a moment, when she's being interrogated under a stark white light, when she looks like a particularly mean kitty-cat. You can't really speak of Tierney on an acting level, but as a model, an icon, a still part around which a plot may revolve.

Tierney was always lucky with her directors, starting out with Fritz Lang in *The Return of Frank James* (1940), where she simpers as a lady newspaper writer. Seeing herself on screen, Tierney thought she sounded like "an angry Minnie Mouse", and so she started smoking heavily to lower her voice. Crucially, she also watched movie ➡

DARK VENUS
A colour still of Gene Tierney wearing one of the costumes her husband designed for her most extraordinary role, as Poppy in Josef von Sternberg's 'The Shanghai Gesture' (a film actually shot in black and white)

KOBAL COLLECTION (2)

after movie in the studio projection room to get a feel for what worked on screen. As a talented mimic, she soon picked up the all-purpose female sexy-star style of that time, where your lines didn't necessarily have to make sense but needed to sound interesting, or interested. It was all a question of putting enough air into words at the ends of sentences and making them float and purr. (This was basically an MGM house style, and chief among its proponents was Lana Turner.)

In her early films, Tierney was cast in exotic, sexually enticing parts, like her barefoot hillbilly in John Ford's *Tobacco Road* (1941) or her bare-midriffed desert mirage in *Sundown* (1941), where even unflappable George Sanders looks initially undone by the mere sight of her sauntering into a room. That same year, she received negative reviews for her performance as Poppy in Josef von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture*. But from my vantage point, her risky, blatantly sexual performance in that movie is perhaps her best – one of the few times when Tierney really goes all out and plays in a histrionic, often outright goofy fashion.

The Shanghai Gesture was the first film where her husband Cassini designed her clothes, and he took as many chances sartorially as she took emotionally, costuming his wife in black satin and then in increasingly unbalanced, almost ugly dresses that suit the deterioration of her character into all manner of sexual and alcoholic excess. Poppy is a slumming rich girl looking for thrills, and von Sternberg shoots her as a sexual fantasy figure come to life, activating her so that she's like a doll going berserk – her all-out physicality in marked contrast to her still-photo face, which the director lights to sculpt and highlight her cheekbones.

When Tierney sneers in the film – and she does a lot of sneering – her rabbity overbite gives her a comic look that instantly vanishes when she closes her mouth and resumes her position on screen as the Sexiest Exotic Doll of All Time. Von Sternberg has great fun watching such an overly refined beauty go so completely to the dogs, and Tierney seems to be enjoying herself too. But the bad reviews must have scared her, so that she retreated into the more careful, almost sleep-walking style she's known for.

Impassive queen

Towards the end of *The Shanghai Gesture*, Tierney has a close-up where her eyes look vividly nutty, and this nutty look would be rationed out for key close-ups in John M. Stahl's *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), a classic which earned Tierney her only Academy Award nomination. She plays Ellen, a kind of woman's-magazine Hedda Gabler who fixates on Richard (Cornel Wilde), an almost preposterously stupid male novelist who reminds Ellen of her dead father. Tierney is introduced staring at Wilde in a light-green train compartment – to set off her catlike green eyes. The camera follows her around cautiously, momentously, as she walks up stairs in silhouette or swims like a shark underwater. Stahl is stealthily preparing us for Ellen's three most outrageous moments.

Scattering her father's ashes as she rides a horse round and round a New Mexico mesa, Tierney's face is tense and abstracted as she pours the ashes left, then right, as if to a metronome – and all to Alfred Newman's thunderous, percussive score. Later – infamously – in a rowing boat, Ellen lets Richard's crippled brother Danny (Darryl Hickman) drown, sitting there like an impassive, warlike queen behind her fashionable 1940s harlequin sunglasses as he gulps and cries for help. Tierney makes her naturally soft voice sound hard as granite as Ellen talks to Danny before retreating into her silent-executioner mode, her super-woman scorn of Danny's physical weakness putting her in line with Nazi ideology.

Ellen's unblinking eyes are so green because they're green with envy, according to the film's script (which was written by one of the best of all screenwriters, Jo Swerling). But the movie itself is more unsettled about Ellen, more in awe of her, and that has to do with Stahl's sober handling of her various and supposed outrages – the last of which is the deliberate aborting of her child by throwing herself down the stairs of her home.

"This baby's making a prisoner out of me!" Ellen cries, and I'm sure that most women who have been pregnant can relate to her feelings of entrapment and the lengths she will go to break free of it. The really shocking thing about this scene is not the tumble down the stairs itself – which we know Ellen is nervy enough to do – but the preparations she makes first in the mirror of her bedroom, preening at her reflection and fixing her night-gown, so we realise that this is a woman who wants to be as attractively attired and presentable as possible when she's found at the bottom of the stairs. Now that's vanity!

A more obvious 'actress' type than Tierney would have underlined Ellen's pathology, or indicated her evil. Tierney herself said that she viewed Ellen as "insane", but she's much more disturbing in *Leave Her to Heaven* because as an actress she isn't technically able to make choices like that. Instead, she brings her own image and face and body to the role and embodies it as simply as possible, and this very simplicity makes Ellen ambiguous, taunting, unresolvable. When Ellen gets angry at her husband and lashes out at him, Tierney opens her face so that it looks wild, uncontrollable, and then she closes it so that she looks helpless. The girl can't help it! Signals like this might have to do with the fact that Tierney herself was a lifelong sufferer of mental illness, which really flared up in the early 1950s and brought her career to a halt by 1955, when she entered a series of mental institutions and received a round of shock treatments that destroyed parts of her memory.

Private anguish

Mental instability wasn't the only cross she had to bear. In 1943, a pregnant Tierney went to the Hollywood Canteen for a one-off appearance; soon afterwards she contracted German measles, which caused her daughter to be born blind, deaf and severely handicapped. Tierney's anguish over her daughter's condition was compounded when a female fan later approached her to tell her that she had broken her quarantine for German measles to see Tierney at the Hollywood Canteen. Everyone always said that Tierney was even more beautiful in person than in front of a camera, and this woman had wanted to see her in the flesh, not on the screen. Stunned, Tierney said nothing and just walked away. "After that I didn't care whether ever again I was anyone's favorite actress," she wrote in her pained 1979 autobiography *Self-Portrait*.

Otto Preminger stayed loyal to Tierney even as her personal problems began to engulf her. He used her in three more films after *Laura*: in the demanding role of a kleptomaniac who falls under the spell of hypnotic charlatan Jose Ferrer in *Whirlpool* (1950); as another woman mixed up with murder in *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950); and finally in a modest comeback role as a Washington hostess in his political epic *Advise & Consent* (1962), where she walks through his long takes as if on eggshells and holds her head high and still so that you can feel how scared and nervous she is. As an older woman, her voice grew dramatically lower because of her cigarette habit. Once she'd been reduced to slapping Carol Lynley and calling her a tramp in Jean Negulesco's *The Pleasure Seekers* (1964), Tierney decided to retire into the comfort of her second marriage to a kindly Texas oil baron.

THE WOMAN IN THE PICTURE
Gene Tierney in 'Laura' with Clifton Webb, top, and Dana Andrews, below. Opposite, 'Leave Her to Heaven', far left, and 'Where the Sidewalk Ends'

She married well, at the very least. In the late 1940s, when her marriage to Cassini was on the rocks, she had also carried on a serious affair with a young John F. Kennedy. She wanted to marry him, but as a Catholic and a future political candidate he steered clear of marriage to her. Later on, when Kennedy became president, Cassini was hired to provide the wardrobe for his wife Jacqueline. Tierney herself wears a pillbox hat in her first scene in *Advise & Consent*, so she certainly merits mention as a footnote and cross-reference to any Kennedy history, as an early version of Jackie – unsuitable as a married woman, an actress, and mentally precarious, but a solid trial run for what JFK wanted visually.

After Tierney lost her second husband in the early 1980s, Cassini said she used to call him in the middle of the night and talk as if it were still 1943. But she can hardly be blamed for wanting to live in the past. When she was interviewed for French TV in 1985, she was asked if she enjoyed watching herself on screen. No, she replied, not anymore, because she still expected to look like she did in the 1940s. "Every morning, it's a surprise!" she said, laughing ruefully. She died in 1991.

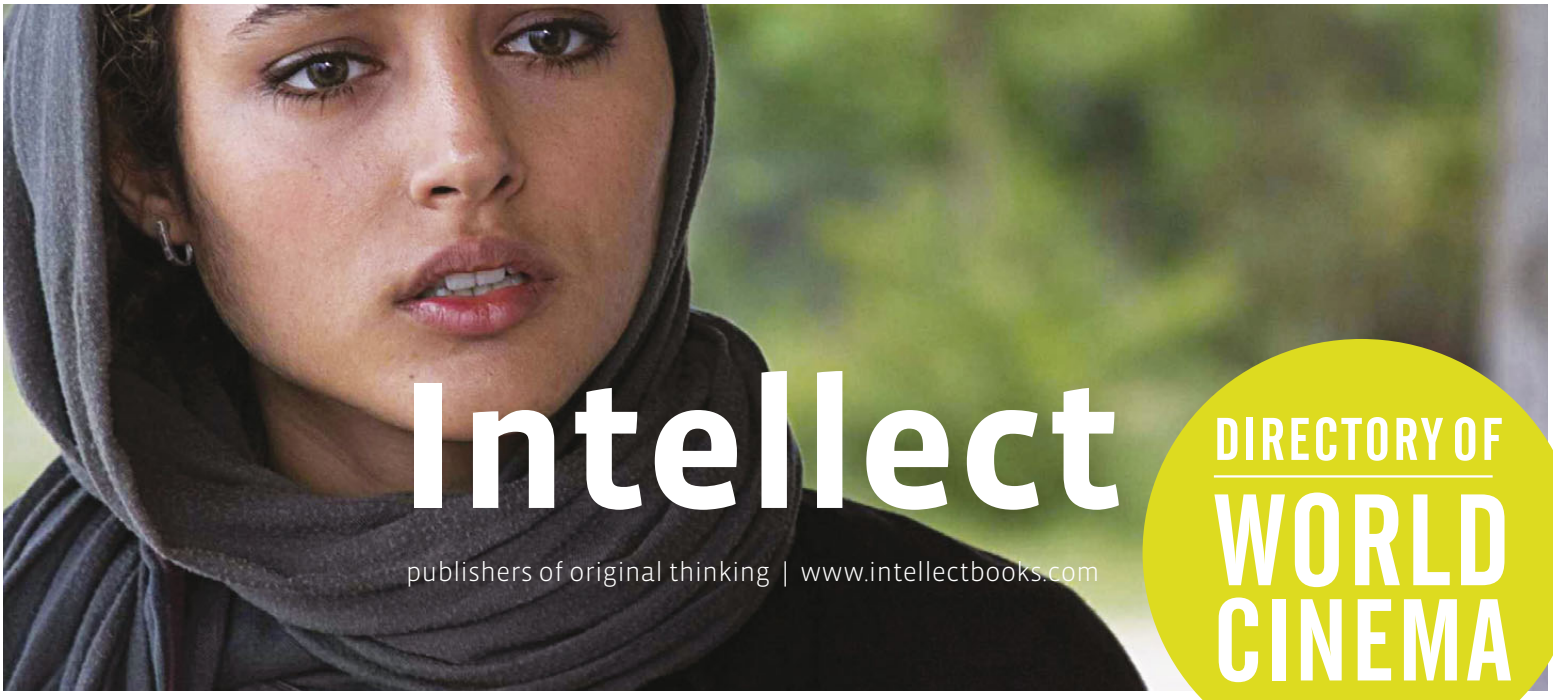
When it comes to Gene Tierney, I think of certain colours, especially the green of her eyes and the fire-engine red of the lipstick on her lips. (In the last scene of *The Shanghai Gesture*, von Sternberg had her lips painted almost white for a particularly depraved effect.) I think of the clothes she wore: the shoulder pads and wide-bottomed women's slacks of the 1940s, Laura's Salvador Dalí hats, Ellen's chinoiserie-style dressing gown – and of course those sunglasses she puts on to murder poor Danny.

But I also think of music: not just David Raksin's famous theme song for *Laura*, which later had lyrics attached by Johnny Mercer about how Laura was "the face in the misty light", but also the romantic Bernard Herrmann score for Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947), full of churnings and crescendos and tributes to the feelings Gene Tierney's face inspires. As an actress in *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, Tierney is only competent; she plays her widow by the sea mainly on one note of self-satisfied defiance. But to many moviegoers, Tierney is the embodiment of a certain kind of 1940s movie experience – someone of whom it can plausibly be said, as Mercer's lyrics have it, that maybe she was only a dream.

Laura exists as a painting in her apartment that hovers over the detective investigating her murder, who soon develops an obsession

'Laura' is rereleased in cinemas on 24 February

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (3)/KOBAL COLLECTION (1)



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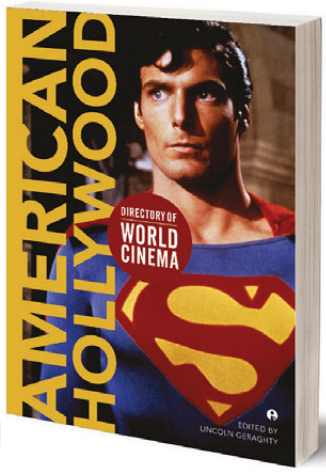

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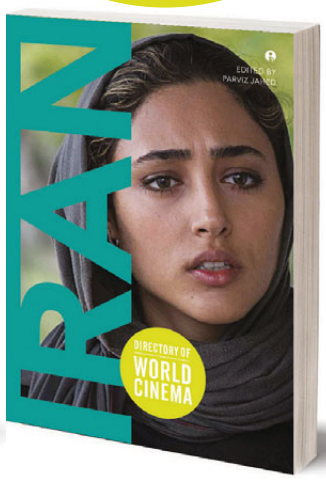

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Reviews

56 FILM OF THE MONTH 58 FILMS 82 DVDS 92 BOOKS

Reviews, synopses and full credits for all the month's new films, plus the pick of the new books and DVDs

With Hadewijch Bruno Dumont has reaffirmed his status as one of today's most individual and genuinely uncompromising auteurs. Hats off to him for making such a militantly uncommercial film ☞ p69

Homecoming queen

After their earlier collaboration on the crowd-pleasing 'Juno', Diablo Cody and Jason Reitman have reteamed for an altogether more bracing follow-up, 'Young Adult', which overturns every romcom cliché. By **Lisa Mullen**

Young Adult

Jason Reitman, 2011

Mavis Gary was the ultimate high-school prom queen, the girl who always had the best hair and the best boyfriend. A work of fiction in every sense, she spent her teens living an all-American fantasy that promised she would forever be a winner in the game of life. As an adult, she has followed this script, moving to the big city to be a glamorous writer, even though that turned out to be a dead-end job in Minneapolis bashing out reams of low-rent Young Adult prose – peddling, in fact, the same fantasies she was sold as a kid. But now she's getting older and the bubble of her self-belief is ready to pop. It's no longer fun to get drunk every night and have one-night stands with men she's met online. It's time to go back to her small-town beginnings and reclaim her crown. And how better to do it than by breaking up the happy marriage of her clean-scrubbed high-school sweetheart, Buddy?

That's the premise of a film that takes a cynical sideswipe at every high-school romcom cliché about the comeuppance of the beautiful but shallow. Diablo Cody's razor-sharp script operates on the basis that we all know how this fairytale goes: proud Mavis will be taken down a peg or two, and so will grow and learn; and then she'll find the bluebird of happiness was right under her nose all the time. Except this time she won't. This Mavis will refuse to take her medicine; she'll bitch, cheat and scheme to get what she wants, and she won't understand why she's wrong to want it. She's a car crash and a train wreck rolled into one, and we're going to cackle happily as the twisted metal flies.

Young Adult is much funnier and infinitely more savage than Cody's earlier collaboration with director Jason Reitman, the cute but rather cosy *Juno* (2007). It is also – despite its character's pathological immaturity – more grown-up. Mavis's wickedness is deliriously refreshing. Her snorting rudeness to everyone she meets – from men she's dating to hapless receptionists – hits you like a faceful of ice water, all the more so since this kind of stuff never, ever comes out of a pretty girl's mouth in the movies – not even in the movies that think they're a bit edgy.

In the sunnier flipside of this film, Matt would be the loveable nerd; in this universe, however, he is an embittered loner with major problems

Charlize Theron couldn't be more perfect for the part of Mavis; not only is she annoyingly beautiful, she also has the intelligence to understand Mavis's tragicomic overlap and the ability to communicate her self-hating undertow at crucial moments.

Equally good is Patton Oswalt as her temporary sidekick Matt, the former classmate who becomes her confidant and drinking partner. They make a glorious double act as they booze and argue themselves unconscious every evening, with Matt trying to talk some sense into Mavis even as he worships at her feet.

In the sunnier flipside of this film, Matt would be the loveable nerd who Mavis finally realises is a diamond in the rough; in this universe, however, Matt is an embittered loner with major problems of his own. A vicious attack by the school's pack of alpha males put his teenage self in hospital for long months, and he's still crippled by emotional scars and physical disabilities. One of the keynote gags is that Mavis is too busy feeling sorry for herself to notice that Matt got a much worse deal. But while Matt is the voice of reason as far as Mavis's misguided quest is concerned, he is, in his own way, just as stuck in the past as she is. Mavis may have a narcissistic personality disorder, but at least she's grappling with life and trying to ease her howling sense of disappointment. Matt has simply given up.

It's this kind of irony that gives the film its unusual texture – and makes the first two acts fascinating and cathartic to watch. But when you've finished hooting at the awfulness of Mavis's bitch-from-hell act, and the film starts moving towards its resolution, it starts to look a lot less subversive. By giving Mavis all the best lines and jolting the film out of the rut of genre expectation, Cody almost allows us to root for the bad girl. But how can that be, when her chosen love interest is a happily married man with a new baby? No, Mavis must be punished after all. She must be exposed as a fake (even her hair is a cheat) and put back in her fictional box. Instead of frail flesh and blood, she becomes an Aunt Sally, there to embody the fears of proper, normal husbands and wives – to be repeatedly knocked down and then ritually killed. Like Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*, she is the predatory single woman as monster. A monster with jokes, a monster with a (gradually revealed) backstory, maybe – but a monster all the same.

Just as *Juno* used cliché inversion and an unconventional female lead to celebrate orthodox apple-pie family values, *Young Adult* is a conservative film at heart. In a sense, Cody and Reitman get stuck trying to have it both ways. Traces of a much less Fox News-friendly treatment are discernible: for comedy reasons, Buddy (Patrick Wilson) has to be a bathetic bore with no discernible personality; but his wife Beth (Elizabeth Reaser)

A SINGLE WOMAN
Mavis (Charlize Theron, above) returns to her home town intent on winning back high-school sweetheart Buddy (Patrick Wilson, below left), but sees more of loser Matt (Patton Oswalt, opposite)

may not be quite the victim she seems. Surrounded by her cronies, arms crossed and ready to face down the "prom-queen bitch" – as she calls Mavis – she looks like she might be nursing a few unsettled scores herself. It is she, after all, who throws the first punch by sending Mavis a gloating email announcing the birth of her and Buddy's baby. As a plotline, though, none of this can be developed any further without upsetting the moral values at the film's core.

This nexus of ambiguity – are Buddy and Beth salt-of-the-earth, nice-person heroes or smug, passive-aggressive idiots? – marks the point where writerly complexity bumps up against the linearity of mainstream film. Reitman deserves full credit for the density of the characterisation and the relentless pace of the action (note that Cody's post-*Juno*, non-Reitman horror-comedy *Jennifer's Body* hit some disappointingly bum notes), but this is surely a writer's film in its electrically supercharged current of ideas.

It's important to remember that Mavis, as well as being a walking fiction, is a genre writer herself. In fact, as she reluctantly admits, she's only one of a team of writers who churn out cookie-cutter instalments of a teen-book series, contractually obliged to follow a narrow preset narrative. At one point Mavis sails into the local bookshop, heads over to a bargain-bin display of her own books, and sets about autographing as many of them as possible before she's escorted off the premises. It's tempting to see this as a bit of sly self-critique from Cody. Like Mavis, she is trying to leave her mark as a writer on some well-trodden fictive territory.

To date, she has succeeded; few screenplays reach the multiplexes so thoroughly stamped with their author's personality as *Young Adult*. But Cody may find that messing about within the confines of established genres is ultimately a frustrating exercise – the ineluctable DNA of the form will always reassert itself. Given the audacity of the work she produces when she's playing by someone else's rules, who knows what Cody could come out with when she's saying what she really means?

For credits and synopsis, see page 80

Dark agendas

Jason Reitman on working with Diablo Cody on 'Young Adult'

JASON REITMAN

I get excited about trying to tell tricky stories with main characters who have dark agendas. Diablo Cody is great at creating characters who have mixed intentions, and yet she never judges them – and I try to do the same as a director. Hopefully Mavis is a character that the audience has never seen on screen before. There's a long history of male characters that we love to hate, but there's actually very few female characters that we love to hate.

It requires great writing and great acting, and that's how I think this movie is going to work, because Diablo wrote a hell of a screenplay and Charlize [Theron] knew exactly how to walk that tonal balance – that very fine razor's edge of being brutal with people and yet very human and very funny. We spend this movie watching her trying to have chemistry with a very handsome man with whom she has zero chemistry, and at the same time see her at ease and romantic with a man we don't expect her to ever have chemistry with. There's a lot of movies that claim to be the most unlikely of romantic stories, but this truly is that film.

The real trick is that for two acts of the film, you watch this completely unlikeable character and you wonder why anyone would want to watch her or how we could ever sympathise with her. Then we get to the third act of the movie and we realise that really her anxiety, her passive aggressiveness, her meanness [are] a key to her vulnerability. In watching her humiliate herself in front of Buddy, in front of everyone she grew up with – in watching people she traditionally pities pity her back – we gain some insight into how fragile she actually is. 'Young Adult' is honest. Ultimately, people don't change. Especially assholes.

The Adopted

France 2011
Director: Mélanie Laurent
Certificate 15 99m 36s

Right at the start of *The Adopted* you can glimpse into the rather limp soul of actress Mélanie Laurent's family drama (her directorial debut). A montage of desperate-to-be-quirky scenes of unconventional, arty sisters Marine (Marie Denarnaud) and Lisa (Laurent) and Lisa's young son Léo plays to a soundtrack of guitar flutterings and the heartfelt voiceover of thirtysomething singer-songwriter Lisa, full of such philosophical nuggets as, "You only live once." It's only too clear that this is a tear-duct baiter disguised as a slightly offbeat indie and the countdown to tragedy is on.

The adopted of the title is Marine, the emotionally spontaneous, bookish orphan who was taken in by Lisa and her mother Mille (both man-wary types) when she was young. But the close sisterly bond between Lisa and Marine – along with the female equilibrium of their family unit – is soon under threat from Marine's nascent romance with food critic Alex (Denis Menochet, who played Laurent's father in the opening scenes of *Inglourious Basterds*).

Throughout, Laurent's camera is never willing to sit back and observe. Instead it's kept busy with frequent close-ups, freeze frames and instances of slow motion. Narratively, the film doesn't sit still either: it's split into three acts, with each one following a different character. First up is Marine as she struggles to overcome Lisa's jealousy – but after a motorbike crash has left the pregnant Marine in a deep coma, the point of view shifts to Lisa and Alex as they try to come to terms with the fact that she may never recover.

Laurent's rather soppy musing on love, life and family is only really held together by some solid performances. Denarnaud, Menochet and Laurent herself do their best with a script that has little imagination or heart (Alex's wooing of Marine is straight out of the romcom textbook) and only has time for misty-eyed emotion when it comes to tragedy. On the very rare occasions that a character doesn't just blurt out their feelings, symbolism is deployed with no regard to subtlety (in one scene, for example, apprehensive single-father-to-be Alex is rushed by a mob of kids).

As Lisa and Alex finally start to forge the friendship that you always knew they would, Laurent's film can't decide whether it wants to stick with the angst and woe or delight in shots of the actors caressed by soft light, blowing bubbles in the bath or posing in playgrounds in freeze frame (particularly irksome is the number of cute-kid filler scenes). So it charts a haphazard path between the two, trying its utmost to be charming and emotionally raw but never achieving either. **Isabel Stevens**

CREDITS

Produced by
Bruno Levy
Screenplay and Dialogue
Mélanie Laurent
Morgan Perez
Chris Deslandes
Director of Photography
Arnaud Potier
Editing
Guerric Catala
Art Direction
Stanislas Reydellet
Original Music by/ Produced by
Jonathan Morali
Yann Arnaud
Sound
Cyril Moisson
Costumes
Maïra Ramedhan-Levi

©moveMovie, TF1 Films Production, StudioCanal, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
Production Companies
A moveMovie, StudioCanal, TF1 Films Production, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma co-production
With the participation of Canal +, CinéCinéma, Arte/Cofinova 6 and Région Rhône-Alpes with Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée

CAST

Marie Denarnaud
Marine
Denis Ménochet
Alex
Clémentine Célarié
Millie
Mélanie Laurent
Lisa
Théodore Maquet-Foucher
Léo
Audrey Lamy
Clémence
Morgan Perez
Philippe
Nicolas Medad
Sébastien
Mélissa Drigeard
Aurélia

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

8,964 ft + 9 frames

French theatrical title
Les Adoptés

SYNOPSIS The film is divided into three acts, all set in present-day Lyon, France.

The first act is told from the point of view of thirtysomething bookshop owner Marine. She has a very close relationship with her friend Lisa, a struggling singer-songwriter whose family adopted Marine when she was orphaned as a young girl. When Marine falls in love with food critic Alex, Lisa becomes jealous. Marine and Alex's relationship is initially tumultuous – she doesn't get on with his friends, while Lisa refuses to acknowledge Alex. Just as they decide to settle down, Marine is hit by a car and left in a coma.

The second act is told from Lisa's viewpoint. She is upset to discover from her mother Millie that Marine is three months pregnant. Time passes and Lisa regularly visits Marine – whose pregnancy is progressing even though she remains in a coma. Lisa is convinced that Marine will recover fully, and continues to ignore Alex. On her birthday, Lisa receives a sketchbook with photographs and song lyrics that Marine had prepared before the accident.

The third act follows Alex, who worries about facing fatherhood alone. Angry that Marine shows no sign of recovery, he ends up in a fight at a party. Lisa consoles him; they warm towards each other as Alex befriends Lisa's young son Léo. Alex faces up to the fact that Marine won't ever recover but Lisa refuses to accept this. Marine dies but her baby girl is born. Lisa uses Marine's lyrics for her songs. Lisa, Alex, Millie and Léo scatter Marine's ashes.

Crock monsieur: Robert Pattinson, Uma Thurman

Bel Ami

Directors: Declan Donnellan, Nick Ormerod

Guy de Maupassant's second novel, about an unprincipled cad who rises in Belle Epoque Parisian society using women as stepping stones, has often been adapted for the screen, most famously by Albert Lewin as *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami* in 1947, with George Sanders in the title role. Lewin, a cultured Francophile, did a handsome if over-wordy job, but at 41 Sanders was too old for the role, and the Hollywood censors, much to Lewin's annoyance, imposed a moralistic ending in which the cad meets his deserts in a fatal duel. Hard to think of anything more out of keeping with Maupassant's novel, which exudes the urbane cynicism for which the writer was famous.

This new version has no truck with such sanctimony: Rachel Bennette's script offers a faithful rendition of the original, up to and including the ending with Georges Duroy (the amorously ambitious 'Bel Ami' of the title) relishing his triumph over the shallow, corrupt society that he at once despises and personifies. Although

SYNOPSIS Paris, 1890. Twenty-four-year-old Georges Duroy, discharged from the French Army in Algeria, works as an underpaid clerk. In a dance hall he meets former army comrade Charles Forestier, now political editor on campaigning journal *La Vie Française*. Forestier offers Georges a job as a writer. He also invites him to dinner, where Georges meets Forestier's wife Madeleine and her friend Clotilde. Madeleine writes Georges's first article for him, but rejects his advances; she sends him away when her elderly friend the Comte de Vaudrec arrives. Georges calls on Clotilde, whose young daughter Laurine nicknames him 'Bel Ami'. Georges and Clotilde start an affair but she breaks it off when he's hailed by a prostitute at the dance hall.

Georges neglects his work and is sacked from the paper. Madeleine advises him to appeal to Madame Rousset, wife of the paper's owner, who gets him reinstated as head of gossip. He renews his affair with Clotilde. Madeleine takes Forestier, who is seriously ill, to Cannes; Georges visits them and is there when Forestier dies. Georges marries Madeleine. Rousset conspires with an opposition politician, Laroche, to bring down the government over a planned invasion of Morocco, using Georges's ghosted articles as ammunition. Georges starts an affair with Madame Rousset. Vaudrec dies, leaving his estate to Madeleine; she admits to Georges that the Comte was her lover. The new government, with Laroche as foreign minister, prepares to invade Morocco. Georges realises that Rousset and Laroche will profit hugely, and that he's been excluded from the scam. He quits the paper and brutally rejects Madame Rousset.

Suspecting that Madeleine has begun an affair with Laroche, Georges bursts in on them with detectives, and starts divorce proceedings. After gatecrashing the coming-out party of Rousset's teenage daughter Suzanne, he elopes with her; since she's compromised, Rousset is obliged to let them marry. Now reinstated at the height of Parisian society, Georges sees that Clotilde is happy to take up with him again.

it's well grounded in its period – Budapest locations convincingly impersonate 1890s Paris, and rampant French colonialism in North Africa provides a murky political backdrop – the film's themes feel remarkably topical. An Arab country is invaded for ostensibly high-minded motives; political parties denounce each other's policies while surreptitiously adopting them; the press attacks the corruption from which it profits; and a young man of no discernible talent attains celebrity thanks to a pretty face and a plausible manner.

Joint directors Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod, here making their feature debut, are best known for their work with Cheek by Jowl, the avant-garde theatre company they founded in 1981. If *Bel Ami* occasionally feels airless and overly art directed, that may partly reflect the period it's set in, but also the directors' over-indulgence in facial close-ups. It's almost as though they didn't trust their actors to express emotions in mid-shot – the last thing you'd expect from theatrical directors. This does Robert Pattinson, as Bel Ami, no favours, since in close-up his face tends to lapse into the bovine, but at further remove he gives an alert, amusedly insinuating performance. A scene where he plays tag with his soon-to-be-lover Clotilde (Christina Ricci, appealingly kittenish) and her little daughter brings out the boyish charm that stands him in such good stead with the Parisian ladies. Even so, he's outpaced in the acting stakes by his trio of lovers: Ricci, Uma Thurman as his mentor and subsequently his wife, and Kristin Scott Thomas touchingly vulnerable as his boss's wife. As Thurman's Madeleine notes, unwittingly setting Georges out on his unscrupulous path to the top, in this seemingly male-dominated society the really important people are the wives – and the same goes for the film. **Philip Kemp**

CREDITS

Producer
Uberto Pasolini
Screenplay
Rachel Bennette
Based on the novel by Guy de Maupassant
Director of Photography
Stefano Falivene
Editor
Masahiro Hirakubo
Production Designer
Attila F. Kovacs
Composers
Lakshman Joseph de Saram
Rachel Portman
Production Sound Mixer
Simon Hayes
Costume Designer
Odile Dicks-Mireaux

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Production Companies
[TBC]
Executive Producer
Simon Fuller

CAST

Robert Pattinson
Georges Duroy
Uma Thurman
Madeleine
Kristin Scott Thomas
Mme Rousset
Christina Ricci
Clotilde
Colm Meaney
Rousset
Philip Glenister
Charles Forestier
Holliday Grainger
Suzanne Rousset
Natalia Tena
Rachel the prostitute
James Lance
François Laroche
Anthony Higgins
Comte de Vaudrec
Thomas Arnold
Louis

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

Bloom service: Judi Dench, Celia Imrie

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

USA/United Arab Emirates/ United Kingdom 2011
Director: John Madden
Certificate 12A 123m 34s

Hollywood, conscious that the burgeoning grey dollar is just as green as any other box-office revenue, has cautiously upped the elder onscreen quotient in recent years. Action films such as *RED* and *The Expendables* and grizzled life-lesson *Crazy Heart* have moved sixtysomethings from their traditional place in a film's margins and put them front and centre. Films that address the everyday problems of older age full-on are still rarities, however. So John Madden's jaunty dramedy about a motley crew of British retirees 'outsourcing' their pensionable years to a Jaipur retirement home goes gently (*very* gently) where mainstream cinema fears to tread.

Aimed squarely at an older audience for whom there is nothing like a Dame, unless it's two (both Maggie Smith and Judi Dench are here, bolstered by sterling performers like Tom Wilkinson and Bill Nighy), the film is a well-cast if lightweight adaptation of Deborah Moggach's 2004 novel *These Foolish Things*. It doesn't shrink initially from portraying the problems of retirement – Britain is painted in the opening scenes as grey in climate and mood, prohibitively expensive and elder-unfriendly. But the film rapidly shucks off the book's meditation on ageing in favour of casting India as the cure for whatever ails you, dishing out late-blooming love, septuagenarian sex and new leases of life all round. As if to keep us from dwelling on mortality and dwindling pensions, Ol Parker's script keeps the mood determinedly upbeat – when Graham the gay judge (Wilkinson) dies suddenly, he's already been happily reunited with the Indian lover who'd been banished from his youth.

With eight characters to cater for, the script settles for a simple problem-and-solution set-up for each of them, relying on its all-round amiability to compensate for a lack of dramatic chewiness. Even Dev Patel's mother-dominated hotel manager is smartly matched up with his true love in the interstices between the main plots. Similarly, characterisation is pared down to a single defining trait, so that Dench's widow Evelyn is as warm as Penelope Wilton's bullying wife is hectoring or Celia Imrie's gold-digging granny saucy.

With the exception of Evelyn, spreading her wings tentatively for the first time and relishing India's fast-changing culture, the performances lack nuance, though they're solid enough to make the film glide along agreeably. Maggie Smith puts a fine top-spin on her waspish lines as the doleful Muriel ("I don't plan far ahead – I don't even buy green bananas"), while the rest of the ensemble bat the film's gentle comedy about deftly enough. Most of the gags squeeze easy if sympathetic laughs out of pensioners seeking sugar daddies or sex, and even easier ones from satirising English shock at Indian food and driving habits.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel takes a very western view of India, as an exotic locale that's materially poor but rich in quality of life. While the film isn't as stylised visually as *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) or *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), the camera happily soaks up lashings of local colour, as window-dressing and life-lesson combined. Graham, an old India hand, personifies the film's travel-brochure attitude: "I love the light, colour, smiles – it teaches me something." Pleasant, picturesque, proficiently played but frothier than a lassi, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* has only the lightest of lessons to impart. **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Graham Broadbent
Pete Czernin
Screenplay
Ol Parker
Based on the novel *These Foolish Things* by Deborah Moggach
Director of Photography
Ben Davis
Editor
Chris Gill
Production Designer
Alan MacDonald
Music
Thomas Newman
Sound Recordist
Resul Pookutty
Costume Designer
Louise Stjernsward

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Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures present in association with Participant Media and Imagenation Abu Dhabi a Blueprint Pictures production
A film by John Madden
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Ricky Strauss
Jonathan King

CAST

Judi Dench
Evelyn Greenslade
Bill Nighy
Douglas Ainslie
Penelope Wilton
Jean Ainslie
Dev Patel
Sonny Kapoor
Celia Imrie
Madge Hardcastle
Ronald Pickup
Norman Cousins
Tom Wilkinson
Graham Dashwood
Maggie Smith
Muriel Donnelly

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS
Colour/Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

11,121 ft + 0 frames

SYNOPSIS Jaipur, present day. A disparate group of impoverished English pensioners sell up and move to a 'luxury' retirement hotel in India, in reality a dilapidated mansion. They adjust to life in India with varying degrees of success. Widow Evelyn blossoms into a job training call-centre workers, while gay ex-judge Graham secretly seeks the Indian lover he lost in his youth. Muriel, a racist Cockney recovering from hip surgery, is befriended by her Dalit carer. Gentle Douglas is bullied by Jean, his India-hating wife, who has a crush on Graham. Gold-digger Madge seeks a lover, and elderly lothario Norman finds one. Graham is reunited with his lover, but dies of a heart attack soon after. Evelyn and Douglas become close. Sonny, the young hotel manager, fights with his mother – she plans to close the hotel and force him into an arranged marriage. Encouraged by Evelyn, Sonny defies his family and proposes to his girlfriend Sunaina. Muriel, a bookkeeper, saves the hotel by finding investment for it and becoming assistant manager. Jean and Douglas leave for the airport to go home, but Jean declares their marriage over en route. Douglas returns happily to Evelyn and the hotel.

Best Laid Plans

United Kingdom 2011
Director: David Blair
Certificate 15 107m 46s

If the title of David Blair's *Best Laid Plans* didn't already provide a sharp nudge, the opening scenes featuring wiry, fast-talking scouser Danny (Stephen Graham) and hulking, slow-witted Joseph (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) quickly establish a conscious update of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* to contemporary Nottingham. The plans that have gang agley in this instance have left Danny with a debt of £10,000 to local crime boss Curtis (David O'Hara), which are to be paid off by exploiting Joseph's prowess with his fists in a series of vicious cage fights whose profits come from worldwide internet syndication.

Like Steinbeck's George, Danny is a cynic who lives by his wits, a paradoxical combination of conscience and ruthlessness, with a soft side that he tries to keep well hidden. He convinces himself that he's looking out for Joseph's best interests, even if it means exposing him to considerable pain and danger. He's also something of a romantic, unfazed by the discovery that his would-be girlfriend Lisa (Emma Stansfield) works as a prostitute. In fact, the only thing he finds significantly daunting is the prospect of behaving himself at a dinner hosted by polite middle-class liberals such as Joseph's girlfriend Isabel's parents.

Befitting his extensive TV experience, Blair's film is expertly put together, but the director's best work (*The Lakes*, *The Street*, *Accused*) had the considerable advantage of source material written or overseen by Jimmy McGovern. The latter's touch is badly missing from first-timer Chris Green's screenplay which, despite offering a potentially explosive cocktail of crime, sex, class, race and disability (Isabel was brain-damaged at birth), too often takes the easy option, bending over backwards not to offend. A glaring example is the way that, aside from two throwaway references, Joseph's ethnic origins are seemingly irrelevant. Since shots of him caged, wailing and cowering as assorted white men batter him with their fists, can't help but trigger associations with the cruellest of human exploitation, the film would have been far more intriguing if Green had tackled this and similar themes head-on.

The film is on stronger but distinctly schematic ground with the parallel relationships between Danny/Lisa and Joseph/Isabel. The former is initially entirely sexual: Lisa's phonebox card may say "Feeling lonely?" but she's only in the business of offering temporary respites, and charges extra for kissing. Bursting in on them accidentally, Joseph leaves with the notion that 'bitch' is a term of endearment, and piledriving intercourse the best method of expressing affection – with tragically inevitable consequences during an initially consensual clinch with Isabel. However, Lisa's snap decision that Danny might be good boyfriend material after all feels too much like narrative contrivance, as does a crucial *deus ex machina* intervention by Curtis's rival Deano in the penultimate scene. It says much for the uniformly excellent performances that they're almost strong enough to overcome this.

Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Produced by
Michael Knowles
Stacey Murray
Brad Moore
Written by
Chris Green
Additional script material by Jeremy Sheldon
Directors of Photography
Ali Asad
Daf Hobson
Edited by
Pia Di Ciaula
Production Designer
Kristian Milsted
Music Composed by
Rob Lane
Sound Recordist
Grant Bridgeman
Costume Designer
Rebecca McManus

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Production Companies
Moli Films presents in association with EM Media, AV Pictures, Scarce Resources Limited, Editz Limited and The Fyzz Facility a Moli Up North Production of a Made Up North Film
Executive Produced by
Mark Foligno
Richard Turner
Executive Producers
Lee Brazier
Chris Hainsworth
Angad Paul
Chris Wright
Chris Green

CAST

Stephen Graham
Danny
Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje
Joseph
Maxine Peake
Isabel
David O'Hara
Curtis
Brad Moore
Jon
Nick Moss
Marco
Lee Ingleby
Deano
Eric McNichol
Jay the barber
Emma Stansfield
Lisa
Sarah Parks
Marianne

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Films

9,699 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Nottingham, the present. Small-time criminal Danny cares for Joseph, a large black man with a child's mental age. Joseph is adept with his fists, as he demonstrates on local gangster Curtis's henchmen when they attempt to collect Danny's £10,000 debt, and also on bullies tormenting Isabel, a young woman brain-damaged at birth. Curtis proposes that Joseph take up cage fighting to settle the debt. Danny bribes Joseph with the promise of a camper van. Although Joseph wins his bouts, Danny is horrified by the violence. Joseph and Isabel fall for each other, and Danny strikes up a relationship with prostitute Lisa, though she considers it business. Although Isabel's parents Roger and Sue are relieved that their daughter has a genuine boyfriend, dinner with Joseph and a nervous Danny goes badly, and an initially consensual clinch between Joseph and Isabel leaves her bruised. Danny pretends that Roger (who in fact was sympathetic) called the police, using this to persuade Joseph to continue the fights. Curtis tells Danny that he's staked his business on a final fight against the notorious Doyle, who is represented by his rival Deano. Lisa, increasingly drawn to Danny, offers him her savings to buy the camper van. Danny tries to cancel the fight, and Curtis orders Doyle to beat him up. Joseph interrupts and takes on Doyle himself, ultimately winning. Curtis orders Danny at gunpoint to hand Joseph over, but is shot dead by Deano. Danny, Joseph, Lisa and Isabel drive to the countryside.

Big Miracle

USA/United Kingdom/Japan 2012
Director: Ken Kwapis
Certificate PG 106m 51s

The drippy conclusion of *Big Miracle* flows not from its own premise but some other supervening logic. Drawn from a true-life tale of 1988, the titular miracle is the rescue of two whales, found trapped in the ice in a remote part of Alaska, by an unlikely coalition of conflicting interests, brought into temporary alliance by mutually beneficial cynicism. Oilman J.W. McGraw (Ted Danson), in an early instance of 'greenwashing', sees in the situation an opportunity to improve his company's chances of obtaining drilling rights on a nearby nature reserve; the cannier locals choose to help save a few whales in the present in order to protect their longstanding right to hunt them in the future; the White House steps in to help presidential candidate George Bush; and finally, after Ronnie talks to Russia, Gorbachev lends an icebreaker.

The story was written up as a book with the subtitle 'How the Media Created the World's Greatest Non-Event', and for some time the film threatens to endorse what Kristen Bell's ambitious reporter character Jill makes explicit: trapped whales make a sad story but are not, considering what doesn't get covered, legitimate national news. It gets picked up by the national networks instead of a horrendous train crash in India and mass layoffs at Chrysler. But by the end the film has instead turned on self-described "smelly, drunk, depressed Barbie" Jill and sided with her colleague Adam (John Krasinski), a paragon of enlightened self-interest, leaving a puddle of lukewarm uplift where cold calculation and hot corn meet.

The dramatic potential in the pattern of the self-interested decisions that bring about the whales' freedom, material in need of a Billy Wilder or Alexander Mackendrick, is squandered, the conflicts mostly tied up but seldom resolved. A local boy whom Adam befriends and inadvertently tempts away from his roots with a Walkman decides to stay put after all. Adam has it both ways, rejecting Jill and the chance of professional success for his insufferable environmentalist ex Rachel (Drew Barrymore) while somehow keeping hold of his old job, despite having failed to film the whales' escape. Rachel may or may not continue to criticise the Inuit for hunting whales. Whether McGraw – whose efforts actually come to nothing – wins his drilling rights is unclear, but the last reel sees him still on top, indeed, doing better than ever.

Henry K. Miller

Blubber time: Drew Barrymore

CREDITS

Produced by
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Steve Golin
Michael Sugar
Screenplay
Jack Amiel
Michael Begler
Based on the book *Freeing the Whales* by Thomas Rose
Director of Photography
John Bailey
Editor
Cara Silverman
Production Designer
Nelson Coates
Music
Cliff Eidelman
Sound Mixer
Richard Bryce Goodman
Costume Designer
Shay Cunliffe

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Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents an Anonymous Content/Working Title production
A Ken Kwapis film
In association with Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producers
Liza Chasin
Debra Hayward
Stuart Besser
Paul Green

CAST

Drew Barrymore
Rachel Kramer
John Krasinski
Adam Carlson
Kristen Bell
Jill Jerard
Dermot Mulroney
Colonel Scott Boyer
Tim Blake Nelson
Pat Lafayette
Vinessa Shaw
Kelly Meyers
Ted Danson
J.W. McGraw
John Pingayak
Malik
Ahmaogak Sweeney
Nathan
John Chase
Roy
Ishmael Angalook
Hope
Bud

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

9,616 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Alaska, 1988. Local television reporter Adam Carlson finds three whales trapped by the ice. When the story is picked up by the national networks, his Greenpeace activist ex-girlfriend Rachel begins to agitate for their rescue. She demands that oil tycoon J.W. McGraw make one of his icebreakers available; McGraw sees the opportunity to improve his green credentials, and consents. Rachel then shames the governor into calling out National Guard helicopters to drag the icebreaker into position.

Rachel also criticises the Inupiat, the area's native inhabitants, for whaling; the eldest among them, seeing the danger that bad publicity might pose to their way of life, says they will back the rescue effort. The White House gets behind the effort too, in an attempt to improve Vice President Bush's environmental record in the last weeks of the general election campaign. Colonel Boyer, the guardsman in charge of the operation, is sceptical about the politics of the mission, but is charmed by White House staffer Kelly Meyers.

Adam takes a shine to NBC reporter Jill; like him, Jill sees in the assignment a chance to boost her career – though unlike Adam she is entirely cynical about it. McGraw's icebreaker becomes stranded in the ice, and one of the whales dies. President Reagan calls Mikhail Gorbachev to ask for assistance from a nearby Soviet vessel, which is duly forthcoming. The two whales go free. Adam reunites with Rachel.

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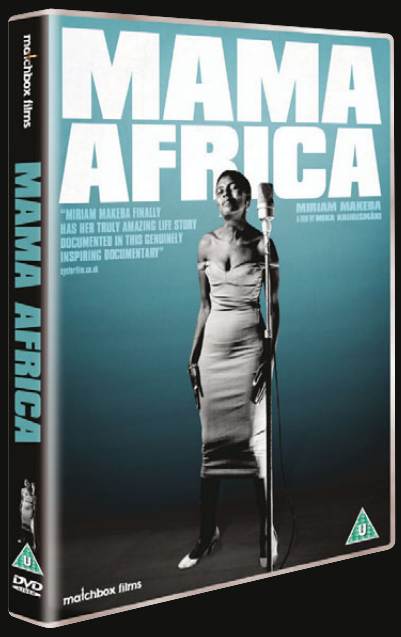

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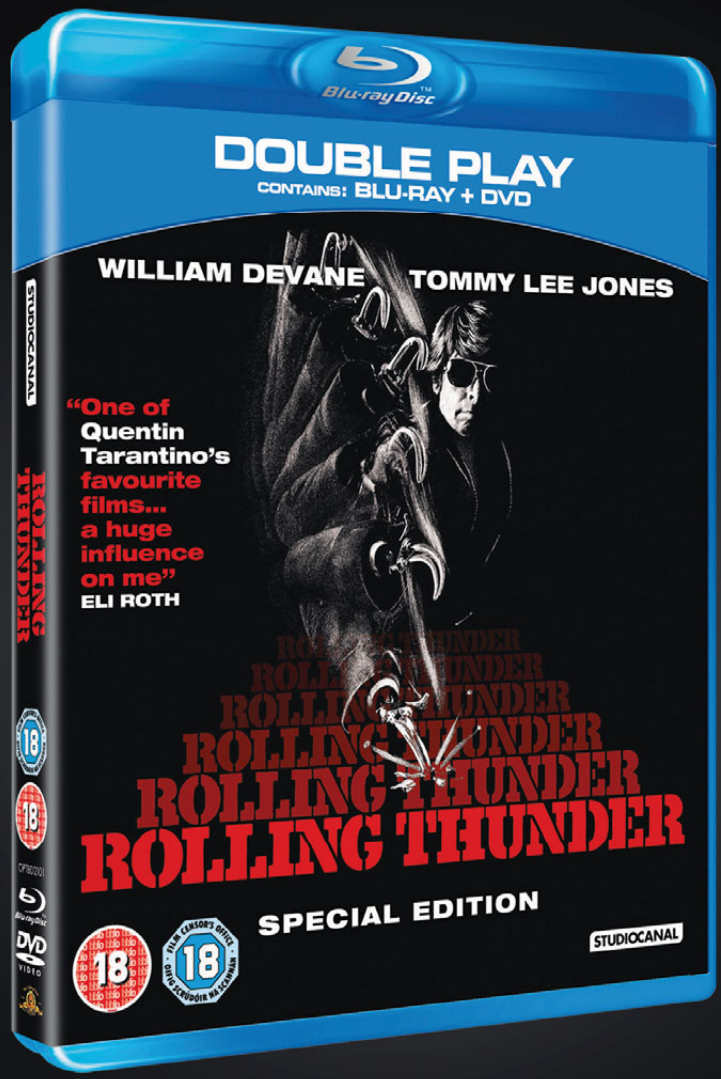
TAXI DRIVER
AND RAGING BULL



EXTRAS

ORIGINAL THEATRICAL TRAILER WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY BY ELI ROTH • UK EXCLUSIVE AUDIO COMMENTARY WITH CO-WRITER HEYWOOD GOULD, MODERATED BY ROY FRUMKES • UK EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH LINDA HAYNES • ORIGINAL TV SPOT

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Squeals on wheels: Mike Brune

Blood Car

USA 2007
Director: Alex Orr

"It's the future – like, two weeks from now," deadpans a suited government agent direct to camera in *Blood Car*'s opening scene, eating crisps like a cinemagoer as he introduces "a story about a man... about his invention... about society... about you."

So, with this flagrant breach of both chronological logic and the fourth wall, *Blood Car* immediately establishes its absurdist tone. Alex Orr's feature debut was in fact completed in 2007, winning acclaim and awards at various festivals before going straight to DVD in the US – but in the half decade that it's taken to get its theatrical release in the UK, the film has left its influence on Quentin Dupieux's left-field 'road movie' *Rubber* and Dean Francis's more conventional highway horror *Road Train* (both 2010), the former similarly featuring a killer car part, the latter a carnivorous engine.

The idea of a blood-fuelled vehicle can be traced back to *Ferat Vampire* (1982, featuring Dagmar Veskrnová, future wife of Czech president Václav Havel, in a nude role), but Orr, co-writing with Adam Pinney, inventively uses this trope to satirise the ethical, social, ecological and geopolitical exhaust left by America's all-consuming love affair with the car, that great symbol of status and mobility, in a world increasingly running on empty. If 'two weeks from now' has since become 'several years ago', and *Blood Car*'s specific barbs at the Bush administration's willingness to engage in war and 'patriotic' murder over its dwindling oil supply have lost some of their sting, there is still ongoing relevance in the film's allegorical commentary on America's addiction to a lifestyle fuelled by precious, limited and destructive resources.

When vegan kindergarten teacher and amateur inventor Archie Andrews (Mike Brune) discovers that his prototype engine requires human blood to work, he is quick to abandon his every principle to keep the motor ticking over so that his auto-obsessed, man-eating new girlfriend Denise (Katie Rowlett) will continue fuelling his own carnal desires. The result is a mordant, raunchy and at times gory trip into the dark heart of the American Dream, as everyman Archie's drive to stay on the road becomes a Faustian pact, with the price for his full tank being others' lives and his own soul.

Making the most of his low budget and fully embracing a B-picture sensibility, Orr loads his film with broad caricatures, low humour and hilariously surreal (and politically incorrect) digressions. But this is an exploitation movie *about* exploitation, and its disarming goofiness and transgressive vulgarity eventually give way to images of state execution and infanticide – all in the name of the American Dream – that are shockingly serious, if still played for uncomfortable laughs. A speech of frankly insane justification delivered by another government agent (Matt Hutchinson) near the film's end evokes *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) – and indeed *Blood Car* is similarly apocalyptic in its lampooning of post-millennial anxieties, with a gleefully cynical finale pointing to a dead-end future for all but a self-serving political elite. A couple more weeks down the road, *Blood Car* will be a cult classic.

Anton Bitel

SYNOPSIS America, the near future. Petrol prices are so high that nobody drives. Archie Andrews – kindergarten teacher, vegan and amateur inventor – hopes to run a prototype engine on wheatgrass, and makes daily purchases of wheatgrass juice from adoring vegan vendor Lorraine. Archie accidentally discovers that only blood will power the motor. Fuelled with Archie's own blood, the car draws the amorous attentions of man-eating meat vendor Denise. Secretly observed by government agents, Archie attaches rotor blades to the motor. The blood of animals killed by Archie fails to get the engine running, but the corpse of his recently deceased neighbour makes it roar. As infatuated with Denise as she is with his car, Archie goes to ever greater lengths to keep his tank filled, even resorting to the murder of strangers. Two agents abduct Archie, intending to shoot him and take the car, but Archie kills them and escapes.

Another two agents are killed trying to steal the car, and Archie, blood-spattered and crazed, spends a carnivorous night with Denise before remembering his priorities and returning to his classroom, where he is arrested. Agent Watkins reveals that other agents have crashed Archie's car while stealing it again, and that Archie must rebuild the blood engine as his patriotic duty; in return, he will get a new life and whatever he wants. As Archie agrees, agents execute everyone from his past. Finally, a smiling Archie, suited like an agent, is seen tossing a baby into the engine of a new car.

CREDITS

Produced by
Tony Holley
Chris Antignane
Jon Swindall
Christopher Campbell
Alex Orr
Adam Pinney
Written by
Adam Pinney
Alex Orr
Story
Hugh Braselton
Adam Pinney
Alex Orr
Director of Photography
Adam Pinney
Chris Campbell
Editors
Adam Pinney
Jon Swindall
Production Designer
Robert Paraguassu
Sound Designer
Mike Clark
Costume Designer
Stephanie Aylworth

©[none given]
Production Company
Fake Wood Wallpaper presents

CAST

Mike Brune
Archie Andrews
Anna Chlumsky
Lorraine
Katie Rowlett
Denise
Marla Malcolm
hitchhiker
Matt Hutchinson
Donald Watkins
Mr. Malt
car jacker
Jonathan Green
axed agent
Matt Stanton
shot agent
Vince Canlas
Agent Shim
Hawmi Guillebeaux
whiny agent
Bill Szymanski
Vietnam vet

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Left Films

Carancho (The Vulture)

Argentina/South Korea/ France/Chile 2010
Director: Pablo Trapero

Carancho, the latest feature by director-producer Pablo Trapero, a key figure in the renaissance of Argentine independent cinema, homes in on the morally dubious fact that every human tragedy may be exploited for financial gain. Trapero once again directs his wife Martina Gusman, this time as Luján, a thirtysomething trainee doctor from the provinces. On emergency call in a Buenos Aires hospital she meets Sosa (Ricardo Darín, best known here for *Nine Queens* and *The Secret in Their Eyes*), a lawyer who, since losing his licence, has been working as a *carancho*, a 'vulture', mediating between road-accident victims and insurance companies to extort as much money as possible from both. Their ensuing affair will expose not only the corruption of this (apparently) widespread practice in Argentina, but also reveal a few of the protagonists' own skeletons.

More ambitious in scope than previous Trapero films such as *Crane World* (1999) or *Lion's Den* (2008), *Carancho* clearly shows the director moving towards a more mainstream cinema, albeit still operating within the social-realist mode that characterises his work. But although *Carancho* attempts to meld social drama and love story with the genre mechanics of a more straightforward action thriller, it never quite feels as if the various elements fully click, making for a bustling, formally agile yet unconvincing viewing experience.

The film opens promisingly, establishing a tone of downbeat fatalism right from the opening shots: a series of extreme close-ups of car accidents, black-and-white stills that may well be real. Shot by DP Julián Apezteguia in meticulously gruesome detail, much of the action is set in the nocturnal gloom of the hospital's emergency area or in empty roads and parking lots, playing out in the sodium glare of electric lights and the disquieting stillness of night-time shifts. The deliberately hyperrealist style successfully creates a mood of oppressive claustrophobia but occasionally borders on the self-conscious.

With more than a nod to the storyline of *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999), both Sosa and Luján turn out to be as damaged as Nicolas Cage's ambulance driver, though Trapero's efforts to evoke their personal purgatories feel more muted than Scorsese's. In fact, this doomed-lovers narrative seems flat and predictable, and its principal characters underwritten, leaving both Darín and Gusman stranded. Not even Darín's usually mesmerising screen presence and natural charm are enough to flesh out his anti-hero-to-Robin-Hood transformation, although he still manages to leave Gusman's junkie doctor conspicuously exposed, her

Scavenger hunt: Ricardo Darín, Martina Gusmán

slightly affected performance visibly weaker by comparison.

Tellingly, a redemptive respite arrives in the form of a small-hours coffee and chat. Here Trapero gets back to familiar territory – the human factor – and manages to conjure the old magic, giving Sosa and Luján enough space to build up a rapport as they hit on each other. The glances, the half sentences, the silliness of the conversation, the silences – all are far more involving than the otherwise pervasively hectic style.

It's not long before we're propelled back into the stylised bleakness of flickering corridor lights and the busily obtrusive handheld camerawork fixated on car-crash victims and pools of blood. In the end, like its protagonists, *Carancho*'s social and political comments are crushed under the film's mannerisms and contrived oppression, sealed with a coda that turns the dial towards 'sensationalist'.

Mar Diestro-Dópido

CREDITS

Producer
Pablo Trapero
Screenplay
Alejandro Fadel
Martín Mauregui
Santiago Mitre
Pablo Trapero
Director of Photography
Julián Apezteguia
Editing
Ezequiel Borovinsky
Pablo Trapero
Art Direction
Mercedes Alfonsín
Sound Director
Federico Esquerro
Costumes
Marisa Urruti

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Production Companies
Matanza Cine, Finecut, Patagonik, Ad Vitam, L90 Producciones with the support of INCAA - Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía y Artes Audio and Programa Ibermedia present a film by Pablo Trapero
Executive Producers
Martina Gusmán

CAST

Ricardo Darín
Sosa
Martina Gusmán
Luján
Carlos Weber
Perro
José Luis Arias
Casal
Fabio Ronzano
Pico
Loren Acuña
Mariana
Gabriel Almirón
Muñoz
José Espeche
Garrido

Dolby Digital

In Colour [2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Axiom Films Limited

Argentinian theatrical title
Carancho

SYNOPSIS Buenos Aires, the present. Luján, a thirtysomething trainee doctor with a drug problem, is doing emergency calls. Following a car accident she meets Sosa, a lawyer who lost his licence and is now working for a company called La Fundación as a carancho, a 'vulture', mediating between insurance companies and crash victims to extort money from both. Luján and Sosa start seeing each other. Sosa determines to stop working as a carancho as soon as he recovers his licence. To help his friend Vega make money to pay off debts, Sosa stages an accident, but Vega is hit too hard and killed. Luján responds to the accident call; on learning the extent of Sosa's involvement, she tells him she doesn't want to see him again. Sosa gets his licence back but can't work in the area because he gave Vega's insurance money to Vega's widow and not to La Fundación; he is beaten up by company men. Luján tends to him and forgives him. At a car accident with five victims, Sosa offers his help and makes a deal with La Fundación: if they let him work in the area freelance, he'll pass them all five cases. But when the insurance money is paid, La Fundación keeps it all. Sosa stages an accident involving himself and La Fundación people in order to recover the money and pass it to the victims. Luján attends the accident but Sosa is badly injured. Driving away together, they are hit by another car. Only Luján survives.

Couch trip: Michael Fassbender, Viggo Mortensen

A Dangerous Method

Germany/Canada/ United Kingdom 2011
Director: David Cronenberg
Certificate 15 99m 31s

In the David Cronenberg filmography, rogue body parts with their own psychotic agenda are a given – the parasitic, penile slugs of *Shivers* (1975), the vampiric armpit barb of *Rabid* (1977), the literal handgun of *Videodrome* (1983), the insectile tumours of *The Fly* (1986), the perplexing vaginas of *Dead Ringers* (1988), the wounds that become sex organs in *Crash* (1996). To this catalogue we can now add Keira Knightley's remarkable chin, which takes on a mind of its own, thrusting forward as if in a bid for independence from her skull when her character's mental illness is at its most manifest and again when she enjoys (presumably) intense orgasms while being spanked by her therapist/lover Carl Jung. The effect is all the more alarming for being achieved without the aid of the prosthetic make-up that characterised Cronenberg's cinema when he was working in the margins of horror and science fiction rather than arthouse literary adaptation.

However, once past the *idée fixe* of the Knightley chin, *A Dangerous Method* is disconcertingly timid, given the subject-matter and the creatives involved. It's Cronenberg's least interesting film since *M. Butterfly* (1993) – not bad exactly, but a quiet, safe period piece, hewn by Christopher Hampton from John Kerr's book as the sort of tidy historical script a Britflick plodder like Joe Wright, Tom Hooper or John Madden could have done just as well. It's an eternal-triangle drama in which Knightley's Sabina Spielrein serves as a catalyst (since all three main characters are analysts, they even note and appreciate this fact) for Carl Jung's rebellion against his father-figure Sigmund Freud, with the cruel irony that Sabina enables Jung's independence but herself becomes a Freudian rather than a Jungian analyst.

When Jung (a vulpine, twitchy Michael Fassbender) rails against Freud (a grey, stolid Viggo Mortensen) for his insistence that all mental disorders are rooted in twisted sexuality, Sabina agrees with her lover in general but notes, "In my case, of course, he'd have been right." The message is reinforced by free-spirited, libidinous loon Otto Gross (Vincent Cassel), who comments that "Freud's obsession with sex has a great deal to do with the fact that he never gets any," but is himself beyond anyone's help and runs out of the film to starve to death off screen. Imbalance between master and pupil is conveyed when Jung happily gabbles out his blatantly symbolic nightmares to Freud but Freud withholds his own dreams from Jung for fear of losing 'authority' in the relationship.

Were it not for the mostly po-faced

SYNOPSIS Switzerland, 1904. Young hysteric Sabina Spielrein is admitted to an asylum under the supervision of psychologist Carl Jung, who proposes to treat her via the 'talking cure', a method of analysis devised by Sigmund Freud.

Jung is intrigued by Sabina, an intelligent Jewish girl with ambitions to become a doctor, and bored with his conventional, often-pregnant wife Emma. After making progress with Sabina, Jung consults Freud about her case and starts to feel frustrated by the older doctor's cautious attitude to the field he has pioneered. Sabina and Jung grow closer; Sabina decides to train as a psychoanalyst. Freud recommends a patient to Jung: the libidinous doctor Otto Gross, another of his disciples and possible heirs. Though Jung is unable to treat Otto's disorders, Otto's example inspires him to begin an affair with Sabina. Jung is torn between his wife, who gives him children and a comfortable home, and Sabina, who insists they have a sadomasochistic relationship. Freud remonstrates with Jung over his interest in parapsychology, fearing it will allow enemies of psychoanalysis to dismiss the new field as a crackpot theory. Fearing for his social standing and reputation, Jung tries to break off with Sabina but the affair continues.

In 1912, Sabina graduates as a psychoanalyst and moves to Vienna, coming under the influence of Freud. Jung and Freud become increasingly estranged and hostile: Freud disapproves of Jung's treatment of Sabina, while Jung is infuriated by Freud's dominance in the field. Shortly before the First World War, Sabina – now married to a Russian doctor – visits Jung's home and finds him troubled by apocalyptic dreams.

treatment there would seem to be a comic edge to the drama, which plays out in couch sessions ("What are your particular interests?" "Suicide, interplanetary travel") and through voiceover epistolary politeness ("Dear friend," Freud always begins, subtly infuriating Jung). In the third act, Jung either goes beyond Freud's hidebound worldview or is dangerously distracted from serious work by expressing an interest in telepathy, prophecy and other paraphenomena – although aside from one scene in which Jung nearly spooks Freud with what might be the beginnings of Carrie-like powers, this angle is rigorously tidied away, like so much else in the story, to concentrate on a central triangle that is as reductive as it is stiffly dramatised.

As a study of psychoanalysis, transference, the ethics of acting-out and the dangers of tampering with the mental blocks people use to shore up their daily lives, this is sadly a lot less insightful and on-the-money than *The Brood* (1979), which made far more of the theatrical drama of revelatory therapy sessions and mind-snapping breakthrough. Given the subject, it's strange there are no Cronenbergian dream sequences to illustrate the Freudian unconscious or Jungian archetype. The battling photographs of Freud and Jung in Jan Svankmajer's *Surviving Life* (2010) remain a more exciting cinematic representation of the differences between the fathers of psychoanalysis than this chatty item.

Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Jeremy Thomas
Written by
Christopher Hampton
Based on the book *A Most Dangerous Method* by John Kerr
Director of Photography
Peter Suschitzky
Edited by
Ronald Sanders
Production Designer
James McAteer
Music Composed and Adapted by
Howard Shore
Production Sound Mixers
Reinhard Stergar
Michal Holubec
Costume Designer
Denise Cronenberg

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Production Companies
Jeremy Thomas presents a co-production of Lago Film, Prospero Pictures and Recorded Picture Company in association with Millbrook Pictures
A David Cronenberg film
Produced in association with Dangerous Method Film AG
Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada, Movie Central, Ontario - Ontario Media Development Corporation, Canada - The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit
Produced in association with The Movie Network - Astral Media, Deutscher Filmförderfonds, FFA, Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, MFG - Filmförderung Baden-Württemberg, Medienboard Berlin Brandenberg GmbH
Made with the support of the UK Film Council's Development Fund
UK Film Council Lottery Funded
Developed with the support of the MEDIA programme of the European Union
Executive Producers
Thomas Sterchi
Matthias Zimmerman
Karl Spoerri
Stephan Mallmann
Peter Watson

CAST

Keira Knightley
Sabina Spielrein
Viggo Mortensen
Sigmund Freud
Michael Fassbender
Carl Jung
Vincent Cassel
Otto Gross
Sarah Gadon
Emma Jung
André M. Hennicke
Professor Eugen Bleuler
Arndt Schwering-Sohnrey
Sándor Ferenczi

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

8,956 ft + 8 frames

The Darkest Hour

USA 2011
Director: Chris Gorak
Certificate 12A 88m 42s

Despite receiving many scathing reviews, the sci-fi thriller *The Darkest Hour* is a capable, sometimes suspenseful thriller for three-quarters of its length, before its belly-flop ending does its best to ruin the film. Until then its alien invaders are effective, invisibly haunting dead cities, their electrical auras triggering car alarms, lighting up street lamps and making mobile phones ring. Like hungry ghosts, they yank people into nothing, their victims exploding into dust clouds in the pulpish sci-fi way pioneered in Joseph M. Newman's 1955 film *This Island Earth*.

The Darkest Hour is directed by Chris Gorak, who previously made the compact paranoia piece *Right at Your Door* (2006), in which Rory Cochrane skulked away from dirty-bomb fallout in his sealed house. *The Darkest Hour* has an empty city to play in, but it still feels like a small film with few characters. At the outset, the protagonists arrive in Moscow for business or pleasure. The opening scene is set aboard a plane when the lights fail – it's a false scare, but also a rather good 'mundane' illustration of the ground-gone-from-under-you panic that all alien invasions strive for. The film is far more enjoyable when the characters are blindly terrified than when they learn (laughably fast) to strike back.

When the aliens arrive, the sight of glowing golden puffballs falling from the night, delighting unsuspecting crowds, is darkly wonderful. Escaping the massacre that follows, Emile Hirsch (*Into the Wild*, *Speed Racer*) and various other attractive young things run around a depopulated Moscow. There are echoes of Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005): the morbid glee in exploding people into dust and rags, and a moment where the characters find a dead aeroplane embedded in a shopping mall. However, the film draws more on John Wyndham's 1951 book *The Day of the Triffids*, with its monsters playing hide and seek in a dead city. The film virtuously infers massive offscreen battles from what the characters see – walls battered with bullet holes, littered guns and bullets on the ground, thick layers of wind-blown ash and, of course, no corpses. (Director Gorak has many art direction and design credits, from *Fight Club* to *Minority Report*.)

Midway, the film descends to acceptable hokum, wheeling on a plot-device mad scientist (and wheeling him off just as fast) before sagging badly. There are efforts to strike a serious note (the shell-shocked survivors realise it's advisable to say their goodbyes in advance, in case there's no time later), but the film squanders chances to kill the 'wrong' characters or break formula like *Cloverfield* (2008) or *Monsters* (2010) did. The aliens are dispiritingly reduced to dull videogame sprites, and the last minutes are indistinguishable from a parody of bad Hollywood sci-fi.

Andrew Osmond

Moscowboys and aliens: Emile Hirsch

CREDITS

Produced by
Tom Jacobson
Timur Bekmambetov
Screenplay
Jon Spaihts
Story
Leslie Bohem
M.T. Ahern
Jon Spaihts
Director of Photography
Scott Kevan

Film Editors
Priscilla Nedd Friendly
Fernando Villena
Production Designer
Valeri Viktorov
Music
Tyler Bates
Production Sound Mixer
Stephane Albinet
Costume Designer
Varya Avdyushko

Visual Effects
Buf, Inc.
Soho VFX
Stunt Co-ordinator
Viktor Ivanov

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Production Companies
Summit Entertainment and New Regency Enterprises present a Jacobson Company/ Bazelevs/New Regency production
Executive Producers
Arnon Milchan
Hutch Parker
Bob Harper
Monnie Wills

CAST

Emile Hirsch
Sean
Olivia Thirlby
Natalie
Max Minghella
Ben
Rachael Taylor
Anne
Joel Kinnaman
Skyler
Veronika Vernadskaya
Vika
Dato Bakhtadze
Sergei
Gosha Kutsenko
Matvei
Nikolai Efremov
Sasha
Georgy Gromov
Boris
Arthur Smoljaninov
Yuri
Anna Roudakova
Tess

Dolby Digital/Datasat
Digital Sound
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

7,983 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Twentysomethings Sean and Ben fly to Moscow to present their new networking website, which they hope will make them millionaires. However, they discover that their Russian business partner Skyler has stolen their concept. Later, they encounter Skyler in a nightclub, along with American tourists Natalie and Anne. Glowing lights descend from the sky and cause people to disintegrate en masse. Sean, Ben, Skyler, Natalie and Anne escape by hiding in a storeroom.

They emerge some days later and find Moscow mostly deserted. The invaders are now invisible, though their electrical auras give them away by triggering devices such as car alarms and lightbulbs. The survivors reach the American embassy, finding a radio message confirming that the attack was worldwide, though it also states that a submarine will take survivors away from Moscow in a few hours. Skyler is killed by the aliens. The others reach an apartment where a scientist, Sergei, has kept the aliens out by constructing a metal 'Faraday cage', blocking electrical fields. With him is an orphan girl, Vika. Sergei theorises that the aliens are composed of wave energy.

Anne accidentally lets the aliens in and is killed. Sergei delays them with a microwave beam gun, but dies too. The others are saved by Russians who have also found ways to fight the aliens. Sean persuades their rescuers to escort them to the submarine. Ben dies in an alien attack. Natalie is separated from the group; Sean, who has grown close to her, leads a counter-attack in a rail yard, destroying several aliens and saving Natalie. Sean, Natalie and Vika leave in the submarine as people around the world fight back against the invaders.

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The Devil Inside

USA 2011
Director: William Brent Bell
Certificate 15 83m 2s

The faux-found-footage horror movie is certainly nothing new, but the returns for last year's *Paranormal Activity 3* suggest there are still plenty of customers willing to feign credulity. Exchanging cinematographic polish for cheap, shabby handheld verisimilitude is an obvious lure for spendthrift producers – which is where a thoroughly cynical product like *The Devil Inside* comes along.

The application of the lo-fi documentary style to a satanic-possession plot was attempted most recently in Daniel Stamm's *The Last Exorcism* (2010), though that film at least used the obfuscation of jumbled shaky-cam to some effect in sustaining the agnostic uncertainty of the plot, and gained traction with a nuanced, teeter-tottering central performance by Patrick Fabian. No one, of course, believed that *The Last Exorcism* would actually be the last – as more modest dramas of faith have disappeared from the screen, visions of profane contortionists have proliferated, with a score of exorcism-themed films released since the identifiable mid-aughts comeback represented by *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*.

And so we come to *The Devil Inside*, the first film I've seen in quite some time when a paying audience saw fit to boo the closing credits – credits that included the URL of a website purporting to offer further information about the 'case'.

Rather than slowly peeling away the scepticism of the investigative documentarians and, by association, the viewer, *The Devil Inside* leaves no room for doubt that dark forces are on the loose, instead quickly settling into the usual 'get thee behind me Satan' floorshows and flaccid shock tactics. Isabella, a young American woman (Fernanda Andrade), arrives in Rome and is soon mixed up in a series of unauthorised exorcisms (one of them on her own mother) performed by rogue priests Ben and David. The plot is a trail of loose ends: what is Ben's sinister secret, which the demon seems to know? What happens to Isabella's mother after the exorcism? In disregarding the basic satisfactions of the well-made narrative, it seems the filmmakers are attempting to introduce the raggedness of life into their hoax of a film. This is here indistinguishable from the raggedness of lazy, indifferent filmmaking. **Nick Pinkerton**

Satanic panic: Evan Helmuth

CREDITS

Produced by
Matthew Peterman
Morris Paulson
Written by
William Brent Bell
Matthew Peterman
Director of Photography
William Brent Bell
Edited by
Timothy Mirkovich
William Brent Bell
Production Designer
Tony DeMille
Music
Brett Detar
Ben Romans
Supervising Sound Designers
Scott Sanders
Peter Lago
Steven Avila
Costumes
Terri Prescott

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Production Companies
Insurge Pictures presents a Prototype production

CAST

Fernanda Andrade
Isabella Rossi
Simon Quarterman
Father Ben Rawlings
Evan Helmuth
Father David Keane
Ionut Grama
Michael Schaefer
Suzan Crowley
Maria Rossi
Bonnie Morgan
Rosa Sorlini
Brian Johnson
Lieutenant Dreyfus
Dr Jeff Victoroff
Pamela Davis
themselves
John Prosky
Father Christopher Aimes
Claudiu Isotodor
Doctor Antonio Costa
Toma Danila
Marco

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

7,473 ft + 0 frames

SYNOPSIS Italy, 2009. Isabella Rossi, a young American woman, arrives in Rome with cameraman Michael to begin filming a documentary about exorcism. What follows is ostensibly their raw footage. Isabella's interest in the subject began when, 20 years earlier, her mother committed three murders after being subjected to an exorcism; one of the victims was Isabella's father. Isabella visits her mother, who was hospitalised in Rome at the request of the Catholic Church, her 'possession' now seen as mental illness. Isabella sits in on a Vatican-approved exorcism class, where she meets two priests, Ben and David. Intrigued by the footage from Isabella's visit to her mother, Ben and David let her in on their secret: in the interests of alleviating suffering, they perform exorcisms without the sponsorship of the Church. Isabella and Michael accompany Ben and David on a house-call in a squalid basement. Convinced of the priests' ability to combat dark forces, Isabella arranges for them to examine her mother. A violent exorcism casts out the demon possessing Isabella's mother – but it now lodges in David, who subsequently tries to drown a baby during a baptism, and then commits suicide. Witnessing this, Isabella has a seizure. Hospitalised, she slits the throat of her nurse; Michael and Ben smuggle her out, certain that the demon has moved into her and must be confronted anew. As they speed away, Ben performs a backseat exorcism. Michael suddenly shows signs of possession, steering their vehicle into oncoming traffic.

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

USA 2011
Director: Stephen Daldry
Certificate 12A 129m 20s

With his post-*Billy Elliot* literary adaptations *The Hours* (2002) and *The Reader* (2008), and now this complex adaptation of Jonathan Safran Foer's bestselling 2005 novel, it's increasingly clear that Stephen Daldry's faithful, sensitive and perfectionist qualities are becoming more of a liability than a guarantee of moral discipline or artistic seriousness.

Few would doubt that Foer's ambitious, modernist novel – which takes a child's-eye view of 9/11 – was a challenging text to adapt for the screen. First you have the literary stumbling blocks: Oskar, the boy trying to reconnect psychically and emotionally with his dead father (killed in the attacks on the Twin Towers), has Asperger's; this gives him a convenient *Rain Man*-style omniscience where needed and allows the writer a pretext for all manner of symbolic, metaphorical, syllogistic and modernist experimentation. How do you put all that on screen? Second is the matter of audience response or readiness. If America was deemed to be in the shocked early stages of national grief when the book was written (and thus more receptive to the 'innocent' responses of a child spectator), maybe in 2012 the screen adaptation could seem an inappropriate reminder, perhaps even an exploitative or patronising simplification? Worse, take away the book's specifics – all the Manhattan lore and all the coded Jewish esoterica – in the interests of attracting a worldwide audience, and you risk losing out in both markets.

Notwithstanding the casting of headliners Tom Hanks and Sandra Bullock as Oskar's father Thomas and his widow Linda, it must be said that the filmmakers have been brave: as Oskar, newcomer Thomas Horn is allowed all the screen time he wants, as are his continual compulsive-obsessive utterances, insights, new-struck aphorisms, entreaties and complaints. Scenes of him wandering the city (shot ably enough by Chris Menges), searching for the owner of a key found among his father's effects, might at times suggest a strangely dreamy, freeform *Zazie dans le métro* experience – were it not for *Extremely Loud*'s complete absence of satire or humour. It isn't a pious movie but it does feel straitjacketed. When Oskar wanders past the famous wall of fliers for the missing, he doesn't look moved – nor necessarily should he be – but rather he's unimpressed by its chaotic panoply, given the taxonomic elegance and completeness of his own researches (which the director comes dangerously close to fetishising).

Interpolated into this high-pitched child's odyssey are short blasts of the past reality: Linda watching the smoke rising from the World Trade Center; Oskar hearing, one at a time, the six increasingly frantic messages left by his father on the family answer phone. Composer Alexandre Desplat modulates his themes to presage a coming moment of release, and at this point you realise that the film is intended finally to function as a weepie, inviting, for the willing, a communal letting-go of tension, or possibly guilt – something the film's very complexities, contradictions and endless contrivances actually disallow.

One of these contrivances is the return to the family of a 'lost' war survivor, connecting 9/11 if not to the Holocaust specifically, then at least to past conflicts such as WWII. If not actively offensive, it's certainly a hell of a lot for one little film to come to terms with – and this extremely disappointing little film signally doesn't. **Wally Hammond**

Key to the city: Tom Hanks, Thomas Horn

CREDITS

Produced by
Scott Rudin
Screenplay
Eric Roth
Based on the novel by
Jonathan Safran Foer
Director of Photography
Chris Menges
Edited by
Claire Simpson
Production Designer
K.K. Barrett
Music Composed and Conducted by
Alexandre Desplat
Sound Mixer
Danny Michael
Costumes Designed by
Ann Roth

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Production Companies
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation
A Scott Rudin production
A Stephen Daldry film
Executive Producers
Celia Costas
Mark Roybal
Nora Skinner

CAST

Tom Hanks
Thomas Schell
Sandra Bullock
Linda Schell
Thomas Horn
Oskar Schell
Max von Sydow
the renter
Viola Davis
Abby Black
John Goodman
Stan the doorman
Jeffrey Wright
William Black
Zoe Caldwell
Oskar's grandmother

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
Colour by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros Distributors (UK)

11,640 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Manhattan, 2000. Amiable, well-to-do jeweller Thomas Schell instructs his precocious nine-year-old son Oskar in methods of scientific enquiry, and teaches him about perseverance and risk through a series of 'quests', such as the search for Manhattan's 'lost' sixth borough, for which he has laid clues throughout the city for his son to find.

A year later, Thomas has died in the attacks on the Twin Towers. The increasingly obsessive, hyperactive Oskar spies through his telescope a strange old man talking to his grandmother in the block across the way from his home. Among his father's effects Oskar discovers a key with the name 'Black' attached. Oskar persuades the old man to help him track down the 472 Blacks listed in the local telephone directory, a painstaking and time-consuming task that brings the boy into contact with a varied cross-section of Manhattan society. Oskar surmises that the old man is his estranged grandfather, a traumatised German WWII victim, and confronts him with the fact.

Oskar finally locates the owner of the key. It transpires that the key was left by accident in a vase bought by Thomas at an auction, and it thus offers Oskar no clues about his father. The search has nevertheless been cathartic for the boy. He tells his mother about his quest through the city; she tells him that, unbeknown to him, she shadowed his every move.

Girl Model

USA/Canada 2011
Directors: David Redmon, A. Sabin

David Redmon and Ashley Sabin's latest documentary *Girl Model* adheres to the transnational template already established in Redmon's first film, *Mardi Gras: Made in China* (2005), which traced the path of Chinese-made beads destined for the famous Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans. The concept of young workers exploited for the benefit of an indifferent capitalist culture is continued in this new film, which similarly follows a supply chain, though this time the commodity is human: a very young would-be model plucked from her home in the bleak Siberian landscape and catapulted into Tokyo's even bleaker fashion world.

Model scout Ashley Arbaugh travels on the Trans-Siberian Railway, raiding the countryside for girls who embody Japanese clients' notions of beauty, which are primarily concerned with youth (Arbaugh concedes that in the Japanese fashion industry, there's no such thing as 'young enough'). One of her discoveries is 13-year-old Nadya, who is offered what seems to be a lucrative modelling contract in Tokyo – which she eagerly accepts, hoping to earn enough to buy a new house for her family. Though Ashley and Nadya's fleeting moments of interaction become rarer following their initial meeting, the two are juxtaposed throughout the film, the former's jaundiced view of the industry alternating with the latter's fresh-faced take on it.

Ashley's jaded outlook – the most intriguing, if slightly unsettling, aspect of the documentary – is a consequence of her own previous career as a model. Footage she recorded of her experiences in 1990s Japan echoes the position in which we now see wide-eyed Nadya. But whereas Ashley was clearly on the verge of a breakdown, depressed and self-obsessed, Nadya – who describes herself as a "grey country mouse" – seems to consider her physical assets unimportant, assuring us that beauty is "from the soul". Her vulnerability is disturbing. Barely able to communicate with her Japanese employers, she struggles alike with foreign culture and high heels. Both women are fragile, surrounded by decisive men whose only interest appears to be their models' ability to make money. A particularly memorable example is Tigran Khachatrian, owner of Siberian agency Noah Models, so called because he believes his company acts as an ark that 'saves' the girls from their disadvantaged situations and offers them a profitable career in the west. The metaphor seems particularly apt since he compares the models to animals, their bodies to be measured, weighed and assessed just like cattle.

Despite Khachatrian's presence, *Girl Model* isn't a personal crusade for the 'freedom' of these underage girls. It's simply a chronicle of a specific market, an attempt to expose the other side of what generally appears to be a 'glamorous' industry. The film's

Pose and cons: Nadya

authenticity, however, is questionable. The press notes reveal that Ashley approached Sabin, a former classmate, and suggested the topic for the film – further demonstration of her need for attention, one no longer fulfilled by the modelling industry. The extent of her involvement in the script is unknown, and we can't be sure whether the character before us is the 'real' Ashley or a partly fictive self-portrait.

Ambiguity haunts the filmmakers too, torn between a duty of care towards the underage Nadya and the need to retain her as a case study for their documentary. These shifting dynamics are noticeably tense, and Sabin admits that the filming process was uncomfortable. It makes the viewing experience more complex than might at first appear, the respective positions of filmmaker and subject never really clearly defined.

Perle Petit

CREDITS

Consulting Producers
Marcy Garriott
Robert Garriott
Cinematography
David Redmon
A. Sabin
Edited by
David Redmon
A. Sabin
Original Score
Matthew Dougherty
Eric Taxier
Re-recording Mixer
Tom Hammond

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Production Company
Carnivalesque Films production
Produced in association with American Documentary/POV, CBC News Network
Produced by
Carnivalesque Films, Inc.

Supported by the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program
Executive Producers for American Documentary: Simon Kilmurry
for CBC News Network: Catherine Olsen

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Dogwoof

SYNOPSIS A documentary set mainly in Siberia and Japan, looking at the world of modelling from the perspectives of 13-year-old newcomer Nadya and former model turned scout Ashley, who spots Nadya in Siberia and offers her a contract in Tokyo. Ashley continues to search for models throughout Siberia. Meanwhile in Tokyo, Nadya finds out that the modelling jobs she was promised are non-existent. She is sent home, owing $2,000 to the Japanese modelling agency. Ashley's views on the modelling industry are intercut with footage of her own negative experiences as a model in 1990s Japan. Though she appears to question her line of work, she continues to scout. Nadya drops out of school to resume modelling in East Asia.

Goon

Canada/USA 2011
Director: Michael Dowse
Certificate 15 91m 32s

Its protagonist is nicknamed 'Doug the Thug'; the ice-hockey matches in which he plays as 'goon' (defending star players by any means necessary) are tipped in advance as "an ass-raping the likes of which only Ned Beatty and the cast of *Oz* can comprehend"; its budget could have been raised via an on-set swear-box; and it contains numerous close-ups of blood-spurting violence accompanied by exaggeratedly amplified bone-crunching. And yet Michael Dowse's fifth feature unexpectedly turns out to be a marshmallow-hearted fluffball of a film.

Much of this is thanks to Seann William Scott's title-role performance. Doug Glatt is as guileless as Bill Forsyth's Gregory, and so sweet-natured that he apologises profusely to anyone who winds up on the wrong end of his ham-like fists, even when they're lying bloody and insensible at his feet. Despite his parents' evident ambitions, Doug is too slow-witted to handle anything other than menial tasks, and his only real skill is his Tyson-like ability to pummel people into the ground in a matter of seconds. When this is spotted in the stands during a game, he's quickly signed to his local hockey side, and then to the struggling Canadian league team Halifax Highlanders, his skating ineptitude notwithstanding. Those concerned that a Canadian film about ice hockey will assume encyclopedic prior knowledge can relax: although much time is spent on the rink, it's easy enough to follow the action, especially since the matches here consist mainly of bare-knuckle boxing with some decorative peripheral figure-skating.

Dowse made his reputation with *FUBAR* (2002) and *It's All Gone Pete Tong* (2004), comedies that generated considerable empathy for people who would normally be dismissed as insufferable prats. He doesn't quite pull off the same trick here: as we saw with his third feature, *Take Me Home Tonight*, his characters are less intriguingly conflicted when they're just plain nice. However, a subplot involving Alison Pill's hockey groupie Eva offers a reminder of earlier work. Clearly smitten by Doug but concerned about his obviously virginal vulnerability, Eva desperately tries not to lead him on in the face of simultaneous presentations of flowers, chocolates and the Highlanders' team mascot Angus ("It's official"). After she bows to the inevitable, Doug spontaneously visits her now ex-boyfriend and meekly submits to a savage beating – behaviour so logical from his perspective as to banish any suggestion of masochism.

Goon owes a substantial debt to George Roy Hill's *Slap Shot* (1977) and suffers from the comparison: the earlier film had a keener sense of character and milieu, and Paul Newman's has-been coach was a far more complex protagonist than Scott's amiable

Folly hockey sticks: Seann William Scott

lummox. When Doug meets his fearsome opposite number Ross Rhea (Liev Schreiber) for a mutually respectful heart-to-heart, the film briefly hints at greater psychological and sociological depth, as do occasional moments such as the pep talks by the team captain revolving around metaphors of divorce and terminal family rupture, but the snappy one-liners are quickly cranked up again.

Still, the writers' Apatow-schooled background ensures they're often genuinely funny ("Well, that was borderline treasonous," comments one player after hearing a pre-match mangling of 'O Canada'), and *Goon* proves surprisingly affable company considering its signature visual motif is a punched-out tooth flying through the air in slow motion.

Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Produced by
Don Carmody
David Gross
Jay Baruchel
Ian Dimerman
Andre Rouleau
Written by
Jay Baruchel
Evan Goldberg
Based on the book by
Adam Frattasio &
Douglas Smith
Director of Photography
Bobby Shore
Editor
Reginald Harkema
Production Designer
Gord Wilding
Music
Ramachandra Borcar
Sound Designers
Pierre-Jules Audet
Jean-François Sauvé
Costume Designer
Heather Neale

©DCP (Goon) Productions Inc and 7319428 Canada Inc.
Production Companies
A No Trace Camping Productions Inc.
A Don Carmody Productions Inc
A Caramel Films Inc
A Inferno Pictures Inc
Produced in association with Téléfilm Canada
With financial investment from Manitoba Film & Music
Produced with the financial participation of Sodec - Société de développement des entreprises culturelles - Québec, Astral's Harold Greenberg Fund
Produced with the participation of The Government of Manitoba Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credit, Québec Film and Television Tax Credit, The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit
Produced in association with Movie Central, The Movie Network
Executive Producers
Jesse Shapira
Mark Slone

CAST

Seann William Scott
Doug Glatt
Jay Baruchel
Ryan
Alison Pill
Eva
Marc-Andre Grondin
Xavier LaFlamme
Kim Coates
Ronnie Hortense, 'Coach'
Eugene Levy
Dr Glatt
Liev Schreiber
Ross Rhea
Nicholas Campbell
Rollie Hortense
Richard Clarkin
Gord Ogilvey
Jonathan Cherry
Marco Belchior

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

8,238 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Orangetown, Massachusetts, the present. When bouncer Doug Glatt objects to a homophobic insult at an ice-hockey game (his brother is gay), the resulting melee leads to him being hired by his home team's manager as a 'goon' responsible for defending key players, violently if necessary. Despite his lack of skating experience, he gains the affectionate nickname 'Doug the Thug' and is transferred to the struggling Canadian league team Halifax Highlanders, charged with defending star player Xavier Laflamme, below par since being concussed by the St John's Shamrocks goon Ross Rhea. Doug wins over his initially dubious teammates and falls for hockey groupie Eva; his sweet but simple nature makes her reluctant to toy with his affections. The Highlanders start winning matches, and Doug replaces Xavier as assistant captain. Doug's parents are horrified by the violence at the game they attend, but Doug is proud of his popularity. Playing the Quebec Victoires, Xavier is concussed and Doug suspended. He meets Rhea in a bar and the older man warns him of his likely career path. During a game against the Concord Minutemen, the puck hits Doug in the face, causing Eva to fall for him. Doug lets her now ex-boyfriend vent his frustrations on him. In the final league match against the Shamrocks, Doug and Rhea meet on the ice for the first time, and after much effort Rhea is finally floored. The Highlanders win 3-2 and become league champions.

The Grey

USA/United Kingdom 2011
Director: Joe Carnahan

In the 21st century, a miniature cycle of low-budget horror/suspense films finds unwary wilderness trespassers attacked by relentless predators who simultaneously illustrate Discovery Channel lessons about territoriality and represent primal forces at odds with presumptuous humanity. This current phase of the terror-by-beast subgenre once typified by *The Birds* or *Jaws* kicked off with *Open Water* (sharks) and has run to variants with crocodiles (*Black Water*, *Rogue*), lions (*Prey*), bears (*Bear*) and more sharks (*The Reef*). There has already been a wolf version of this fable in Adam Green's 2010 stuck-up-a-ski-lift thriller *Frozen*, which prompts *The Grey* to take a more Hemingway-esque – or, in deference to the 'Indianapolis' speech from *Jaws*, Milius-ish – approach, stressing grizzled Liam Neeson's status as alpha male among a rapidly dwindling group of plane-crash survivors.

Just after the lupine alpha has seen off a threat from a challenger within his pack, Neeson's Ottway listens to the posturing of aggressive, trouble-making ex-convict Diaz and puts him down with a few swift hardman moves that capitalise on his post-*Taken* image as the toughest middle-aged star in cinema. Here, Neeson is all the more intense for being allowed to use his natural accent, though it's overegging the pudding to give him a drunken yet poetry-spouting "typical Irish motherfucker" father to fill out a character perfectly well conveyed by a couple of snarls.

This is very much a stripped-down vision of survival, more focused and intense than writer-director Joe Carnahan's previous collaboration with Neeson in *The A-Team* (2010), if a little too content to tread in tracks left by Lee Tamahori's David Mamet-scripted *The Edge* (1997, in which Anthony Hopkins saw off a bear). It builds to a lady-or-the-tiger fade-out as man and wolf prepare for final battle, with Ottway memorably taping airline miniatures to his fist and smashing the glass to equip himself with claws.

The Grey has a real sense of physical peril, with howling tundra winds that mercifully blot out speech-balloon chatter (too many rote snapshots of loved ones left behind by these lonely misfits serve as backstory) and elements combining to make things rough for the doomed humans. When Flannery, the talkative wiseass we assume will stick around to earn the respect of the hero, becomes an unexpected early casualty, the detail that makes the sequence agonising is how difficult it is for men who have learned to trudge to start running through thick snow to get back and shoo away the wolves. However, Carnahan relies on a mix of animatronics, CGI and trained animals for the wolf pack and, aside from a few moments when eyes shine in the dark, fails to invest them with even the threat level found in *Frozen*. It may be that an essential for terror-by-animal movies is the use of real animals and the frisson that comes when they share the screen with insured actors (or their stand-ins) and any trickery defuses the effect. But it may also be that no real wolf can hold the screen against a full-on Liam Neeson.

Kim Newman

Chances with wolves: Liam Neeson

CREDITS

Produced by
Jules Daly
Joe Carnahan
Ridley Scott
Mickey Liddell
Screenplay
Joe Carnahan
Ian Mackenzie Jeffers
Based on the short story *Ghost Walker* by Ian Mackenzie Jeffers
Director of Photography
Masanobu Takayanagi
Edited by
Roger Barton
Jason Hellmann
Production Designer
John Willett
Music
Marc Streitenfeld
Production Sound Mixer
Michael Williamson
Costume Designer
Courtney Daniel

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Production Companies
Open Road Films presents in association with Inferno and LD Entertainment a Scott Free/Chambara Pictures production in association with 1984 Private Defense Contractors
A Joe Carnahan film
Executive Producers
Jim Seibel
Bill Johnson
Tony Scott
Jennifer Hilton Monroe
Spencer Silna
Adi Shankar
Ross T. Fanger

CAST

Liam Neeson
John Ottway
Frank Grillo
John Diaz
Dermot Mulroney
Talget
Dallas Roberts
Henrick
Jeo Anderson
Flannery
Nonso Anozie
Burke
James Badge Dale
Lewenden
Ben Hernandez Bray
Hernandez

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

SYNOPSIS A remote oil refinery in Alaska, the present. John Ottway, a sharpshooter employed to keep wild animals away from the men who work on a pipeline, writes a last letter to his dead wife, whose memory haunts him; he considers shooting himself but holds off. The next day he boards a plane bound for Anchorage with a group of other pipeline workers. The plane crashes in the frozen wilderness. Ottway takes charge, rounding up supplies and making fire and a shelter in the crashed plane. Only seven passengers survive: Ottway, Diaz, Henrick, Talget, Flannery, Burke and Hernandez. Wolves gather and kill Hernandez in the night. Reasoning that they will have to walk off the tundra, Ottway leads the party towards a forest. The wolves continue to harry the survivors, taking Flannery when he falls behind. Ottway has a confrontation with Diaz, a tough-talking ex-convict, but reasserts his dominance within the group, earning the other man's respect. Burke freezes to death, Talget dies in a fall from a cliff, Diaz is overcome by exhaustion and stays behind, and Henrick drowns when he falls into a river while the wolves are attacking. Ottway carries on through the wilderness; he takes refuge in a hollow, which turns out to be the wolf pack's den, and is surrounded by the animals. Still grieving for his wife, Ottway puts thoughts of suicide aside and prepares to do battle with the alpha wolf. Later, man and wolf lie together, severely wounded and perhaps dying.

Hadewijch

France/Germany 2009
Director: Bruno Dumont

French director Bruno Dumont has a reputation as a provocateur, but it's sometimes far from easy to pin down the exact nature of his provocation – which is surely provocation in itself. In his earlier films – notably the US-shot misstep *Twentynine Palms* (2003) – an emphasis on sex and violence made Dumont easier to stereotype as the missing link between Bresson and Gaspar Noé. But in *Hadewijch* and last year's *Hors Satan*, Dumont has found a new register of enigmatic subtlety that – together with a reaffirmed attention to starkly distinctive landscape photography – has resulted in two films that more than match up to his remarkable debut *La Vie de Jésus* (1997).

To sum up *Hadewijch* briefly would not only require a spoiler alert (capsule synopsis: novice nun turns Islamic fundamentalist) but would also suggest the premise of black farce à la Chris Morris. This being a Dumont film, the premise and its execution are to be taken very seriously, though not perhaps at face value. It's worth noting that *Hadewijch* is riddled with gaps and ambiguities, not the least being that while we see former novitiate Céline and her companion Nassir travelling in tense silence on the métro immediately before an explosion at the Arc de Triomphe, we never see either of them plant a bomb. We're left to decide whether Céline really has turned terrorist, or whether the blast is perhaps to be read as a visual metaphor for her nature as an unexploded faith bomb on a short fuse.

The central ambiguity underlying the film only becomes apparent from Dumont's statements in interview: the idea that, while the director considers himself in no way religious, he is deeply committed to the idea of mysticism. For most of us earthly filmgoers this will be an inscrutable paradox, especially in an overtly theological drama about a profoundly, even morbidly religious protagonist, whose self-denying habits – says her Mother Superior – suggest an impious yen for martyrdom.

The film is named after a 13th-century female mystic. It's only near the end that we hear a nun calling Céline 'Hadewijch'; earlier, Céline tells Nassir that it is the name of the convent, which she calls "the place where I was born". The film depicts Céline's agonised journey towards the divine – a journey that leads to a suicide attempt, seemingly a final stab at martyrdom. This ending is preceded rather magnificently by Céline's soliloquised prayer, a quasi-operatic lament scored by the eerily spiritual music of the early 20th-century composer André Caplet (*Hadewijch* is Dumont's most musical film, also taking in live performances of Bach and, representing the thrill of the worldly, energetic accordion punk).

Dumont's lead, young non-professional Julie Sokolowski, perfectly embodies ingénue otherworldliness. A luminous, candidly childlike presence,

Into the habit: Julie Sokolowski

Sokolowski's Céline has a moon-faced pallor that lends itself to evoking both rapture and tortured doubt, her awkward body language underlining her vulnerability. It's largely because of Sokolowski that *Hadewijch* is the first film in which Dumont doesn't seem to present his characters with an edge of implicit condescension: through her, he seems to have discovered compassion as a director, which means that we can read him as taking Céline's extremity of faith with due seriousness and sympathy – not as folly but as spiritual dilemma. The film's obvious theme would appear to be fanaticism, measuring Céline's piety against Islamic fundamentalism. However, Nassir isn't depicted as a fanatic in any clichéd sense, but as a severe but approachable figure, whose religious and political beliefs drive him towards a militant position. Whether or not the elliptical ending suggests that he is a terrorist is one of the film's Rorschach-test elements.

The one theme that we can concretely grasp throughout is that of exile. Leaving the convent, Céline is haunted by the absence of Christ in her life. Her parents' home is her true place of exile: an imposingly opulent apartment (her father is a government minister) on Paris's patrician Ile Saint-Louis, in other words, 'earthly splendour' embodied. It is Nassir – the one person who can speak to her on the abstract theological level that appears to be her natural domain – who offers Céline a new spiritual haven, however dangerous the outcome of their allegiance.

Running in parallel with Céline's story is that of a young workman ('David' in the credits) who, just as Céline leaves the convent, is taken off to prison, apparently for skipping parole. Glimpsed throughout, he returns from his own exile behind bars in time to rescue Céline in what appears to be a redemptive clinch – an embrace at once compassionate and earthily physical.

Here and in the considerably less naturalistic *Hors Satan*, Dumont has made two films that, while they provide ample food for discussion, nevertheless remain tantalisingly slippery; it would take a much longer analysis by a critic who was also a theologian to get to grips fully with *Hadewijch*. Dumont has reaffirmed his status as one of today's most individual and genuinely uncompromising auteurs. And hats off to him for making such a militantly uncommercial film: not only a theme that will leave most viewers cold, but a title that few will be able either to spell or to pronounce.

Jonathan Romney

CREDITS

Producers
Jean Brehat
Rachid Bouchareb
Screenplay and Dialogue
Bruno Dumont
Director of Photography
Yves Cape
Editor
Guy Lecorne
Art Director
Jean Marc Tran Tan Ba
Sound Mixer
Emmanuel Croset
Costumes
Annie Morel-Paris
Alexandra Charles

©3B Productions/Arte France Cinéma

SYNOPSIS Céline, a young postulant nun, is expelled from her convent for excessive zeal. Returning to the Paris home of her wealthy parents, Céline makes friends with a young North African, Yassine. His older brother Nassir invites her to his Islamic study class. Accompanying Nassir on a visit to a war-torn Arab country, Céline pledges support for his militant cause. She and Nassir return to Paris; a bomb explodes. Back at the convent, Céline attempts to drown herself but is rescued by a young workman.

Production Companies
3B Productions in co-production with Arte France Cinéma, CRRAV Nord-Pas de Calais, Le Fresnoy Studio National des Arts Contemporains
With the participation of ZDF
In co-operation with Arte and Herbstfilm Produktion GmbH
In association with Cofinova 5
With the support of Centre national de cinématographie, Region Île-de-France, Region Nord-Pas de Calais
With the participation of Canal +, Cinécinémas, Canal Horizons
In partnership with CNC
With the participation of Contact Films
Developed with the support of Cofinova and Sofica Capital
Executive Producer
Muriel Merlin

CAST

Julie Sokolowski
Céline, , 'Hadewijch'
Karl Sarafidis
Nassir
Yassine Salime
Yassine
David Dewaele
David
Brigitte Mayeux-Clerget
mother superior
Michelle Ardenne
prioress
Sabrina Lechene
novice
Marie Castelain
Céline's mother
Luc-François Bouyssonie
Céline's father

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.66:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

Hunky Dory

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Marc Evans

"There have to be boundaries, lines that do not get crossed." It's the hot summer of 1976, and this warning from the headmaster (Robert Pugh) of a South Wales comprehensive seems unlikely to be heeded. After all, for both his immediate addressee, bohemian drama teacher Miss Vivienne May (Minnie Driver), and her final-year wards on the cusp of adulthood, the breaking of boundaries is key to self-expression and self-discovery. And so, as Viv helps her pupils to put on a rock-opera version of *The Tempest* amid vocal objections from the more conservative members of the school staff, lines will indeed be crossed: not just the usual illicit adolescent occupations of swearing, smoking, drinking and sweaty fumbling, but also love (or at least longing) across the divides of race, generation and sex, even as Shakespeare is coupled with Bowie on an improvised stage where sea meets land.

Genre, too, is unbounded in *Hunky Dory*. On the one hand the film is semi-autobiographical, set at a time when director Marc Evans was still at secondary school in Wales and when his co-writer Laurence Coriat (who also collaborated on Evans's *Patagonia*) crossed the Channel to become, just like Viv's eccentric colleague Sylvie (Julia Perez), a French teaching assistant. On the other hand, it is all at once a rites-of-passage ensemble drama, a musical and a nostalgia piece. Evans and producer Jon Finn (*Billy Elliot*) first conceived the story while working together on *My Little Eye* (2002), long before America's *High School Musical* and *Glee* would come to dominate the whole 'let's put on a show' teen market. But while there is something decidedly British about both the setting and the sensibility of Evans's film – in which dreamy aspirations clash with small-town social realism, and the musical performances, instead of being slickly lip-synched to a canned soundtrack, were recorded 'live' by the cast – it also comes with a calculated upbeat, enshrined in the title (from the name of David Bowie's fourth album) and carried through to a finale that ties up every narrative loose end with a shiny bow (and a glittery show). Yet if these characters are "such stuff as dreams are made on", and their rosy adult futures outlined in a conventional teen-movie coda, the image of soon-to-be-PM Margaret Thatcher glimpsed on a television, and the economic bleakness of our own present, suggest a more bittersweet outlook. **Anton Bitel**

CREDITS

Produced by
Jon Finn
Dan Lupovitz
Screenplay
Laurence Coriat
Director of Photography
Charlotte Bruus Christensen
Editor
Mali Evans
Production Designer
Jacqueline Abrahams
Music
Joby Talbot
Supervising Sound Editor
Stephen Griffiths
Costume Designer
Stewart Meacham

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Production Companies
The Film Agency for Wales & Wales Creative IP Fund, Eyepatch LLP & Panaramic LLP present in association with Aegis Film Fund, Piccadilly Pictures, Atlantic Swiss Productions & Lip Sync Productions, Greene Light Films, Middlemarch Partners & Brecon Media a Big Pond/Big Bad Wolf production
Made with the support of the UK Film Council Development Fund
Developed with the proceeds of The National Lottery through The Arts Council of Wales
Developed with the assistance of Working Title Films
In association with Aegis Film Fund
Supported by The Wales Creative IP Fund
Executive Producers
Reno Antoniades
Paul Brett
Christopher Figg
Sally Greene
Linda James
Norman Merry
Keith Potter
Tim Smith
Grenville Thomas
Robert Whitehouse
Tony Williams

CAST

Minnie Driver
Vivienne Mae
Haydn Gwynne
Miss Valentine
Bob Pugh
headmaster
Owen Teale
Davy's dad
Steve Speirs
Mr Cafferty
Aneurin Barnard
Davy
Kristian Gwilliam
Hoople
Tom Harries
Evan
Adam Byard
Lewis
Danielle Branch
Stella
Kimberley Nixon
Vicki
Kayleigh Bennett
Dena

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

SYNOPSIS South Wales, summer 1976. Recently returned from London to teach drama at her local comprehensive, Miss Vivienne May rehearses a rock-opera version of *The Tempest* with her final-year students. Many of her more conservative colleagues are opposed to the production.

The sensitive Davey, who plays Ferdinand, has a troubled home life and is mooning over ex-girlfriend (and co-star) Stella – she has fallen for an older Afro-Caribbean boy. When the pupil playing Prospero withdraws from the production, Vivienne recruits the kindly headmaster as a replacement, in part to keep him onside. Talented but disaffected Kenny is half-heartedly drawn into the world of his skinhead brother and, unable to tolerate the ribbings of his classmates, quits his role as Caliban. Identifying with the 'outsider' role of Ariel, Evan comes out to his adoring best friend Dena. Musician Jake gets serious with Vicki, but tries to conceal the relationship from his best friend (and Vicki's brother) Lewis – eventually leading to friction between the boys. Davey transfers his affections from Stella to Vivienne, who gently rebuffs him. Davey's younger brother Angus, upset at being abandoned by his mother, runs away. The school hall is burnt down; the police, and several of the staff, suspect Kenny, though he is eventually released for lack of evidence. Angus returns and is reconciled with his father. Without a venue, Vivienne decides to move the performance out into the open air, and persuades Kenny to return to the production.

Power nap: Marcia Gay Harden

If I Were You

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Joan Carr-Wiggin
Certificate 15 114m 45s

The previous films of writer-director Joan Carr-Wiggin –coffeehouse/'maturer' women's romantic comedies such as *Honeymoon* (1997) and *A Previous Engagement* (2008), available here only on DVD or satellite – have made little or no impact in the UK. But, given the comedic sensitivity she shows to the older woman's predicament in *If I Were You*, perhaps it should be greater. Carr-Wiggin has a sly, wry talent for observational comedy – which can almost seem buried by the generally broad performances she employs to surround and counterpoint her central players. Admittedly, the Canadian indie at hand is mightily contrived in the way it plays variations on the theme of a middle-aged woman's betrayal and midlife crisis – and it takes an actress of the calibre of Marcia Gay Harden to carry the viewer through the worst of the endless switchback plot developments and soft, soap-opera-style revelations as mild-mannered fortysomething Madelyn comes to terms with her husband's shock infidelity.

The main device – trick – Carr-Wiggin applies here is making an odd couple out of injured wife Madelyn and 'scarlet' woman Lucy (played by Spanish-born actress Leonor Watling), the contrasts between the former's 'reliability' and unused maternal instincts and the latter's youthful innocence and volatile high spirits dissolving in an unspoken unity, since they are both, in different ways, victims of the same selfish male. The bond they forge is therefore symbolic and also weighted, given that Madelyn knows Lucy is Paul's mistress but conceals her own identity as his wife. Thus their farcical relationship is deepened (somewhat) by the care

SYNOPSIS Toronto, the present. Madelyn, a childless, fortysomething marketing executive, discovers her husband Paul dining with Lucy, an attractive aspiring actress. Later, seeing Lucy buying whisky and a rope, Madelyn follows her home, correctly suspecting that she intends suicide. The emotionally vulnerable Lucy divulges the distressing details of her affair with Paul. Madelyn, though upset, manages to conceal her identity. The two women form a pact, promising to phone one another before taking any major decisions and to do what the other advises.

Madelyn takes to drinking. Instead of giving a lecture at work, she launches into a Freudian anti-husband diatribe, following which she admits to co-worker Keith that Paul has been unfaithful. Delighted, Keith declares his long-hidden love for Madelyn.

Madelyn's friendship with Lucy grows: they share late-night phone calls, which Paul interprets as signs of infidelity on Madelyn's part. Encouraging Lucy to pursue her acting career, Madelyn attends an audition for an amateur production of King Lear and is surprised to be offered the lead role by director Rainer; she accepts on condition that Lucy is given the part of the Fool. Keith's wife informs Paul that she believes Madelyn is having an affair with her husband.

Called to the nursing home following the death of her dementia-suffering mother, Madelyn meets the sympathetic Derek; they make love. Paul discovers that it's Lucy who has been making the late-night calls to Madelyn and confronts her: a bitter Lucy lies, telling Paul that Madelyn has had affairs with both Keith and Derek.

With her husband in the audience, Madelyn appears in King Lear and proves a resounding success.

and responsibility the older woman shows towards the younger (despite a presumably uncharacteristic semi-permanent alcoholic befuddlement).

Deepened may seem a strange word to apply to an entertainment such as this, but it's clear that the director intends (not least in using the pair's brave if sometimes ludicrous rehearsals and performances in an amateur production of *King Lear*) to address profound issues, from betrayal to ageing and death, with a knowing light touch. It's a form of positive discrimination – in favour of the woman's point of view – that may be a little crass but it's rare enough to be refreshing.

In terms of direction too the film is impressive: it's nicely (if not spectacularly) shot by Carr-Wiggin's regular collaborator Bruce Worall, has a fine if muted score by British composer Guy Farley, allows Gay Harden as much room to breathe as she needs, and generally proceeds with an ease belying its potentially histrionic content. And with the introduction of Aidan Quinn – doing an excellent job of not overbalancing the film with his winning portrayal of a warmly sympathetic and timely seducer – Carr-Wiggin provides a finale that suggests open-ended opportunity rather than the usual conventionally, offensively trite moral victory. **Wally Hammond**

CREDITS

Producers
David Gordian
Alan Latham
Written by
Joan Carr-Wiggin
Director of Photography
Bruce Worrall
Editor
Elizabeth Cotter
Production Designers
Aidan Leroux
Sean Breaugh
Music
Paolo Buonvino
Sound Recordist
Bill McMillan
Costume Designer
Brenda Broer

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Production Companies
A Paragraph Pictures production in association with Talltree Pictures
Executive Producers
Savitri Gordian
Vito Bianchini
Luciano Drigo
Peter Bates
Kirsty Bell
Vince Woods

CAST

Marcia Gay Harden
Madelyn
Leonor Watling
Lucy
Aidan Quinn
Derek
Joseph Kell
Paul
Michael Therriault
Rainer, the director
Gary Piquer
Keith
Bethany Jillard
Cordelia
Elizabeth Whitmere
Goneril
Claire Brosseau
Regan
Patrick Garrow
Edmund
Darren Keay
Edgar
Michael Tait
Gloucester
Peter Van Gestel
Kent
Valerie Mahaffey
Lydia

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Renaissance Films

10,327 ft +8 frames

Khodorkovsky

Director: Cyril Tuschi
Certificate 12A 116m 40s

With tens of thousands of Muscovites recently taking to the streets in anti-Putin protests, the release of Cyril Tuschi's visually inventive and exhaustively researched documentary about Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the imprisoned oligarch who stood up to Russia's former president, is certainly well timed. Not that it hasn't already proved a hot potato; the film was five years in the making, and Tuschi has described parts of the shoot as "like being in a bad thriller movie". He and his crew were routinely observed and their movements closely tracked by shadowy figures – unwelcome attention that culminated spectacularly in the theft of the completed film, first in Indonesia, then again on the eve of its premiere at the 2011 Berlinale.

It's evident that someone is desperate to keep Khodorkovksy off the grid; indeed, he's something of a spectre throughout Tuschi's film, glimpsed mainly in archive video and still images, or crudely rendered in monochrome animated segments. When Tuschi finally manages to interview his caged subject briefly during a second trial in 2009, following an abortive attempt to gain access to the Siberian gulag where he was being held, the effect is eerie. *Khodorkovsky* charts how its titular oligarch – who was well on the way to becoming the world's richest man when he was arrested at gunpoint on his private jet by secret service commandos in 2003 – leapt from humble, fervently socialist origins to taking post-perestroika Russia by storm with his dynamic entrepreneurialism. Khodorkovksy is painted in his early years as an aspiring revolutionary, devouring socialist epics such as Ostrovsky's *How the Steel was Tempered*; he went on to write his own manifesto, *The Man with a Ruble*, a sort of how-to of super-capitalism. Forming one of Russia's first private investment banks, Menatep, well before the Soviet fall, Khodorkovsky cemented his stature with the ruthless purchase of oil giant Yukos (now left bankrupt following his arrest).

Drawing on a sometimes overwhelming supply of talking heads, including the oligarch's former colleagues, his exiled US-based family, journalists and politicians, Tuschi makes a compelling – nay, inarguable – case for Khodorkovsky's jailing being an act of sheer spite by Putin, the film positing that Khodorkovsky angered Putin by providing vocal and financial support to opposition parties. However, his impertinent quizzing of the then president concerning possible corruption within the Kremlin may have been more instrumental in the trumped-up charges of tax fraud and embezzlement that were to follow.

Khodorkovsky marks a debut foray into documentary for Tuschi after years of fiction projects, and his background shows in the care taken with the film's aesthetic. Set to Arvo Pärt's plaintive 'Los Angeles' symphony (a work dedicated to the oligarch by the composer), the film opens with the slow unfurling of a Scope frame capturing the Siberian expanse close to Khodorkovsky's gulag, an aptly grandiose prelude to a story of power and retribution. Tuschi cannily plays up the material's resemblance to a political thriller – amusingly, he has his own narration recited by actor Jean-Marc Barr, whose gravelly tones lend a *noir*-ish tinge to proceedings. When we finally see the real Tuschi on camera, his comparatively high-pitched voice prompts a double-take. As the director meets the oligarch face to face after a period of sporadic correspondence, the absurdity of Putin's accusations is thrown into sharp relief. One accusation – that Khodorkovsky stole 300 million tons of oil from his own company – is, the oligarch claims, not even physically possible, since it's more than Yukos could feasibly produce. When Tuschi asks the prisoner why he didn't escape Russia and Putin for good, the answer is simple: the steadfast Khodorkovsky wanted to "face the music" and is prepared to die in jail fighting his cause.

It's a fascinating if overlong chronicle of a horribly one-sided scrap between two global titans – at once a damning indictment of Putin as a petulant megalomaniac and an intriguing portrait of the ultimate champagne socialist. **Matthew Taylor**

SYNOPSIS A documentary exploring events behind the controversial imprisonment in 2003 of Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Interviewees claim that Khodorkovsky was jailed on trumped-up charges of fraud, embezzlement and tax evasion – and his oil company Yukos forced into bankruptcy – because of his outspoken support for Russia's opposition party and his challenging of the then president Vladimir Putin to investigate corruption within the Kremlin. The director meets with Khodorkovsky's exiled family in the US, and travels to the Siberian gulag holding Khodorkovsky, but is denied access. Tuschi finally interviews a caged Khodorkovsky during a second trial in 2009.

CREDITS

Produced by
Cyril Tuschi
Filmed by
Cyril Tuschi
Film Editing
Salome Machaidze
Cyril Tuschi
Music
Arvo Pärt
Sound Design
Martin Frühmorgen

©[TBC]
Production Companies
Rezo Films (Paris) and Farbfilm (Berlin) present a Lala Films production in co-production with Le Vision and BR - Bavarian Television
With support of MBB - Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, MDM - Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung, DFFF - Deutscher Filmförderfonds
A film by Cyril Tuschi
Executive Producer
Claudia Gatzke

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Trinity Filmed Entertainment

10,500 ft +0 frames

Kremlin gremlin: Mikhail Khodorkovsky

Martha Marcy May Marlene

USA 2011
Director: Sean Durkin
Certificate 15 101m 47s

What does it mean to belong? That's the question pondered in Sean Durkin's subtle thriller about a girl who escapes from a sinister cult only to find herself unable to cope in the world outside. Played by first-timer Elizabeth Olsen, Martha (also known as Marcy May or Marlene within the cult) is a seriously damaged individual; although the opening scenes, which show her daring escape from an isolated farm, might fool you into thinking she's going to be the plucky heroine of a conventional redemption fable, it soon becomes clear she's in the kind of mess that isn't going to be fixed with common sense and a few square meals. Martha's heartbreaking naivety is signalled by her fresh-faced prettiness, but even this standard-issue correlation becomes queasy to watch, as the exploitation of one blends into the exploitation of the other, while the camera unblinkingly records Martha's deluded hope that somebody, somehow, might be able to see inside her head and find a way to help her.

Durkin was producer on 2008's coolly shocking *Afterschool*, which pitted an anti-heroic loner against the venality and hypocrisy of a fancy private boarding school. There are traces of the same kind of trajectory in Martha's alienation from the brittle middle-class aspirations of Lucy (Sarah Paulson) and Ted (Hugh Dancy), the sister and brother-in-law who take her in after her escape. Here, though, the dialectic is much murkier: Lucy and Ted are carefully humanised and played with charm and humour by actors who fully understand their plight. Martha, inculcated with anti-bourgeois clichés by cult leader Patrick (John Hawkes), can only throw stale political catchphrases at them, yet her unease about their lifestyle is real. Like the gradually hinted-at circumstances of her childhood, it becomes clear that her rejection of conventionality was the cause, rather than the result, of her attraction to the cult.

Martha can't put this into words; in fact she can't even admit that she has been living in this strange cult, let alone share any of the traumatic incidents that haunt her dreams and waking hours alike. Durkin blends life at Lucy and Ted's desirable Connecticut lake house with scenes from the cult's rundown farm in such a way that the camera moves seamlessly between them, pitching the audience, along with Martha, from safety to nightmare in an eyeblink. It's a deeply unsettling effect, especially as the flashbacks become increasingly horrifying; Patrick wears the mask of a hippie maverick, but is a relentlessly controlling psychopath. This becomes sickeningly apparent, though at times it is also revealed with impressive subtlety; a newcomer remarks that all the children on the farm are boys, and gets the chillingly offhand reply that, "Patrick only has boys."

Martha's silence, though, has its narrative drawbacks. While it pulls the audience into a state of claustrophobic intimacy with her unspoken experiences, it also makes it impossible for any kind of development to take place in the present-day scenes. While this works on an emotional level – unable to move forward, Martha spirals downwards into paranoia, fearing that the cult members are watching and waiting somewhere just out of sight – it is frustrating to watch. Durkin withholds any prospect of resolution, and then, just when the characters arrive at crisis point, he switches off the camera. How you feel as you leave the cinema will depend on whether you find this kind of ending intriguing or annoying. Either way, you'll be haunted and disturbed by a film that seeps into your consciousness on a slow drip-feed and then refuses to let go.

Though billed as a thriller, it really sits just outside that category, evoking and playing with the conventions of horror via its spooky rural settings. Perhaps fittingly for a film about liminality, repeatedly referencing thresholds and the dangers of crossing them, it shifts uneasily between genres, never quite able to belong.

Lisa Mullen

Identity theft: Elizabeth Olsen, Sarah Paulson

SYNOPSIS The Catskills, US, present day. Martha lives with a group of young people on a dilapidated farm presided over by an older leader, Patrick. Within this cult, Martha is known as Marcy May, though she uses the name Marlene whenever she is in contact with the outside world. Early one morning, Martha escapes; she is followed to a nearby town by one of Patrick's acolytes, but refuses to return; she calls her estranged sister Lucy to come and pick her up.

Staying with Lucy and Lucy's husband Ted in a luxurious lake house in Connecticut, Martha is unable to describe her experiences and only says that she has been living with a boyfriend. She suffers flashbacks, reliving traumas including being drugged and raped by Patrick, being involved in robbery and murder, and colluding in drugging another girl so that she can be raped.

Lucy tries to communicate with Martha and begins to blame herself, but Ted becomes increasingly irritated, especially after Martha accuses him of being a shallow materialist. Martha finally breaks down, convinced that Patrick and his disciples are watching her. Lucy and Ted arrange for her to enter psychiatric care; as they drive away, Martha is convinced that she will be recaptured by the cult.

CREDITS

Produced by
Josh Mond
Antonio Campos
Chris Maybach
Patrick Cunningham
Written by
Sean Durkin
Photographed by
Jody Lee Lipes
Edited by
Zac Stuart-Pontier
Production Designer
Chad Keith
Music
Saunder Jurriaans
Danny Bensi
Production Sound Mixer
Micah Bloomberg
Costume Designer
David Tabbert

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Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures, Maybach Cunningham and Filmhaven Entertainment present a Borderline Films production in association with This Is That
Supported by the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program
Additional support from the Sundance Institute/Annenberg Feature Film Fellowship
Executive Producers
Ted Hope
Matt Palmieri
Saerom Kim
Saemi Kim

CAST

Elizabeth Olsen
Martha
Christopher Abbott
Max
Brady Corbet
Watts
Hugh Dancy
Ted
Maria Dizzia
Katie
Julia Garner
Sarah
John Hawkes
Patrick
Louisa Krause
Zoe
Sarah Paulson
Lucy

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

9,160 ft +8 frames

Michael

Austria 2011
Director: Markus Schleinzer
Certificate 18 96m 22s

It would be a refreshing change to read a review of a recent Austrian film that doesn't mention Michael Haneke. But from its uncomfortable premise (loosely inspired by the Natascha Kampusch case) through its opening static shots of dreary domestic detail – a TV, a chopping board, a table set for two – to its very title, Markus Schleinzer's feature debut is replete with reminders of Austrian cinema's blue-eyed boy. Perhaps that's not so surprising considering Schleinzer has been casting Haneke's films since 2001.

He's clearly been paying attention during the process – for *Michael* 'does' Haneke very well indeed. Tracking the relationship and routines of damp-eyed, moleish insurance salesman Michael and Wolfgang, the small boy he keeps locked in his basement, Schleinzer and DP Gerald Kerkletz maintain a cool, dispassionate but elegant style. It is all ellipsis and implication – the only suggestion that Michael is abusing his captive, for instance, is a prosaic shot of him splashing his genitals clean in the bathroom sink. By comparison, Nabokov seems positively graphic.

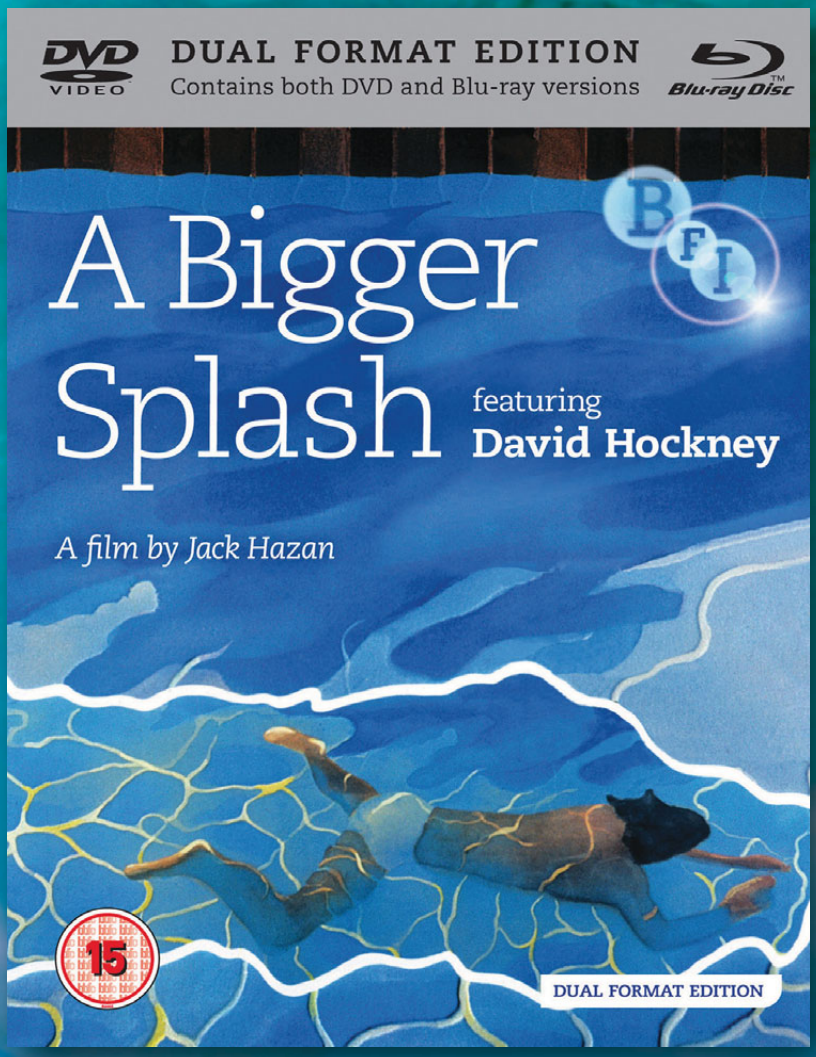
Indeed it's even possible that Schleinzer might outdo his mentor by introducing a note of levity into proceedings. As Margaux Fragoso's incendiary 2011 memoir *Tiger, Tiger* made all too clear, many paedophiles are childish, pathetic figures; and sure enough there's something rather cartoon-villainish about the beleaguered Michael, whose cunning plans are always backfiring. His attempts to play with the big boys – joining two alpha males for a lads' skiing trip – land him face down in snow and seething halfway down a mountain. His attempts to seduce small boys seem equally silly – whether throwing snowballs at an eyeball-rolling Wolfgang or jabbering about remote-controlled cars to seasoned go-karters at a local track. At what might, in another film, have been its most sinister point, Michael intones gravely: "This is my knife, and this is my cock: which one should I stick in you?" The fact that he is mimicking a line from a late-night movie, that his flaccid penis is dangling out of the flies of his brown cord slacks, that the weapon in question is a butter knife and that his supposedly terrified quarry simply responds "knife" without so much as looking up, gives rise to a snort rather than a shudder.

Of course, the question of whether or not this is an ethically appropriate response to the subject of child abuse is a thorny one. One could respond that *Michael* isn't so much about paedophilia as about the social climate that surrounds the film's central character: the alienation of a life behind office dividers and automated shutters. In this respect, Schleinzer's film is the latest in a long line of Austrian artworks to make the connection between individual and societal dysfunction – Elfriede Jelinek's

A BIGGER SPLASH

featuring David Hockney

A film by Jack Hazan



This intimate and ground-breaking docu-drama about David Hockney and his circle was filmed by director Jack Hazan between 1971 and 1973, a critical period in Hockney's career.

Now available for the first time in a director-approved High Definition transfer, this Dual Format Edition also includes two rare archival films on Hockney.

Released 30 January.

bfi.org.uk

Order now from amazon.co.uk

Stuck in the mittel with you: Michael Fuith

grotesquerie, for example, has much in common with *Michael*. Yet this is well-trodden ground, and one wonders what's so new about Schleinzer's contribution, whether the sensitive subject-matter really adds anything to the equation. On a rare day trip out, Michael chastises Wolfgang for failing to hold a telescope straight. "Don't you want to see what I'm trying to show you?" he tuts. It's tempting to ask what exactly it is that Schleinzer is trying to show us. *Michael* is an extraordinarily polished debut, and a fine example of the type of neo-modernist, socially scathing cinema that Austrian filmmakers do so well. But it leaves one yearning for the genuine provocation of Todd Solondz's *Happiness* (1998), for example – or indeed, the novelty of an early Michael Haneke.

Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Producers
Nikolaus Geyrhalter
Markus Glaser
Michael Kitzberger
Wolfgang Widerhofer
Written by
Markus Schleinzer
Director of Photography
Gerald Kerkletz
Editor
Wolfgang Widerhofer
Production Designers
Katrin Huber
Gerhard Dohr
Sound Design
Veronika Hlawatsch
Costume Designer
Hanya Barakat

©NGF
Production Companies
Produced by NGF - Geyrhalter Glaser Kitzberger Widerhofer
With funding from Österreichische Filminstitut/Austrian Film Institute, FISA Filmlocation Austria, Film Fonds Wien, Cien Tirol
In co-operation with ORF Film/Fernseh-Abkommen

CAST

Michael Fuith
Michael
David Rauchenberger
Wolfgang
Christine Kain
mother
Ursula Strauss
sister
Viktor Tremmel
brother-in-law
Xaver Winkler
nephew 1
Thomas Pfalzmann
nephew 2
Gisela Salcher
Christa

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

8,673 ft + 0 frames

SYNOPSIS Austria, the present. Office worker Michael seems pleasant but shy, avoiding relationships with colleagues and family. In the basement of his suburban house he keeps locked away a pre-pubescent boy, Wolfgang; it's implied that Michael sexually abuses him. Wolfgang is allowed into the main house for meals, and Michael occasionally takes him out for day trips. However, when Wolfgang falls ill, Michael can't risk taking him to hospital; as Wolfgang's illness worsens, Michael digs a hole in a nearby wood. Visiting a pharmacist for medicine, Michael is knocked over by a car and hospitalised. On his release, he discovers that Wolfgang has recovered.

Months pass. Michael visits a go-kart track, where he befriends a small boy called Philip. After Philip's father calls him away, Michael returns to Wolfgang with the news that the friend he'd promised to bring him will no longer be coming. Michael goes on a skiing trip with friends (leaving extra food for Wolfgang), and has a sexual encounter with a waitress.

At work, Michael receives a promotion and throws a party to celebrate. When he returns home, Wolfgang attacks him, throwing boiling water in his face. Michael locks Wolfgang in the cellar and attempts to drive to hospital. En route, he is killed in a crash. At Michael's funeral he is mourned by his colleagues and family. Clearing out his house a fortnight later, Michael's mother opens the door to Wolfgang's basement cell.

A Monster in Paris

France/Belgium 2011
Director: Bibo Bergeron
Certificate U 89m 47s

Test footage from French CGI cartoon *A Monster in Paris* appeared at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival several years ago. It showed an appealingly designed film with a strong chanteuse musical number sung by Vanessa Paradis ('L'Arnacoeur'). The design and music are the best assets of the finished film, which is well staged, witty and likeable. However, it has structural problems, and may have trouble finding a UK audience. The publicity has sold *Monster* as a children's/family film, but ominously its distributor, Entertainment One, isn't releasing it in a school holiday.

A comedy-thriller, the story has literary echoes of *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, though the 'monster' quickly turns out to be benign. It's a flea, grown to hulking size by a mad scientist's potion, who stumbles on the doorstep of a beauteous woman singer, voiced by Paradis. While the creature cannot speak, it sings with the voice of Sean Lennon, and the characters dance and duet. (In the French-language version, Paradis is paired with Matthieu Chédid, who sang 'Belleville Rendez-vous' in the 2003 film of that name.)

While *Monster*'s plot is whimsical even for a cartoon, it's brought off charmingly, with the flea characterised as a childlike innocent with a heart-shaped face and (onstage) a white half-mask with funny overtones of the *Phantom* musical. The musical numbers themselves are beautifully animated and sung. Though not monstrous, the giant flea is suited to spectacle, leaping to the tops of landmarks such as the Sacré-Coeur and (inevitably) the Eiffel Tower. The bouncing flights are often shown through the creature's eyes, harking back to a classic short cartoon, *Jumping* (1984) by Tezuka Osamu.

The *mise en scène* is a sweetly cartooned Paris, full of white stone walls, pearly fogs and amusing body shapes, especially among the bit-part characters. There's an emphasis on broad cartoon contrasts, such as that between the petite singer and her oversized co-star. Unfortunately, the film's first half is slack, with too much time given to a male odd couple who trigger the flea's transformation. Their tiresome fast-talking will leave children behind, though a literate monkey compensates. Another disappointment is that the situation doesn't really go anywhere, giving way to an overstretched chase and too many codas. However, cartoon fans will appreciate the end titles, which show off the concept art and character designs.

Andrew Osmond

Monster's ball: 'A Monster in Paris'

CREDITS

Produced by
Luc Besson
Screenplay
Stéphane Kazandjian
Bibo Bergeron
Based upon an original story by Bibo Bergeron
Editor
Pascal Chevé
Production Designer
François Moret
Original Score
M
Patrick Renson
Sound Designer
Samy Bardet
Animation Designer
Fabrice Joubert

©Europacorp, Bibo Films, France 3 Cinéma, Walking the Dog
Production Companies
A co-production of Europacorp, Bibo Films, France 3 Cinéma, Walking the Dog in association with uFilm and uFund
With the participation of Canal+, France Télévisions, CinéCinéma
Executive Producer
Eric Goossens
Toon Roebben

VOICE CAST

Adam Goldberg
Raoul
Jay Harrington
Emile
Danny Huston
Victor Maynott
Bob Balaban
Paté
Sean Lennon
Francoeur
Vanessa Paradis
Lucille
Madeline Zima
Maude
Catherine O'Hara
Carlotta
Mathew Geczy
Albert
Paul Bandey
narrator

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
E1 Films

8,080 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title
Un Monstre à Paris

SYNOPSIS Paris, the first half of the 20th century. Friends Raoul and Emile make a delivery to the workplace of an eccentric scientist. While there, they accidentally mix potions; the explosive reaction causes a flea to grow into a hulking seven-foot humanoid and leap around Paris. With the city panicked by the 'monster', the ambitious Inspector Maynott plots to boost his reputation by killing the creature.

The flea encounters Lucille, a strong-willed nightclub singer. Initially frightened, Lucille is astonished when the creature breaks into song (another effect of the potion). Lucille realises that the flea is harmless and brings him into the club. Naming him Francoeur (meaning 'honest heart'), she disguises him with a mask and joins him on stage in a duet. Later, however, Maynott comes searching for the creature.

Joined by Raoul (a former acquaintance) and Emile, Lucille tries to fake Francoeur's death, but their plan goes wrong. Maynott pursues Francoeur through Paris, cornering the creature on the Eiffel Tower. He apparently kills Francoeur before being arrested for his crime. Later, however, it becomes clear that Francoeur merely returned to his original size. Raoul and Lucille confess their love for each another.

The Muppets

USA 2011
Director: James Bobin
Certificate U 109m 39s

Plutocrats are villainous staples of American cinema from D.W. Griffith through the western to Mamet, but *The Muppets*' baddie Tex Richman, a remorseless oil billionaire who wants to drill under Muppets Studio, prompted the ire of Fox Business Network anchor Eric Bolling, who branded the film "communist". The Muppets' liberal agenda is no secret: 'The Rainbow Connection', the Oscar-nominated finale of *The Muppet Movie* (1979), is a hymn to "the lovers, the dreamers". The song is reprised here to close the telethon show that the Muppets, reunited after years apart, stage to raise the money to buy off Richman. Alas, despite the knowing deployment of screwball let's-put-on-a-show tropes, their attempt is in vain. But Kermit rallies his troupers with a moving speech proclaiming that the essence of Muppethood is not "the building or the name, it's each other".

It's this combination of idealism and pop-cultural smarts that makes the Muppets unique. Jack Black, reluctant host of their telethon, might complain about a barbershop quartet of puppets ruining 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', but the film cannily knows that its audience will recognise the cameo by former Nirvana member Dave Grohl, and will both feel the angst-ridden protest of the source song and enjoy the artful silliness of the parody. We learned that ability as children from television's *The Muppet Show*, the second pilot episode of which, in 1975, was cannily titled 'The Muppets: Sex and Violence', although (and because) neither of those overused selling-points appeared in the show.

Returning to the screen in 2012, the Muppets remain free of sex and violence, although casting recently-out actor Jim Parsons as the human double of new Muppet Walter, the fan whose ardour reunites the gang, offers an implicitly queer reading of the Muppets' alternate showbiz family. Perhaps more importantly, and unlike other nostalgic reboots such as *The Smurfs* (2011), the film is free from CGI, 3D and any narrative reference to cell phones or the internet, though there is a 1980s robot with a modem. Similar visual gags about Tab and Molly Ringwald make the film's intended primary audience clear: generations X and Y, who grew up with *The Muppet Show* and *Sesame Street*, and thus with the Muppets' hippy ideals which they may want to impart to their children. Kermit's signature song in the show, 'It's Not Easy Being Green', spoke both to liberal identity politics (reflected in the film's ethnically diverse cameos) and to the anti-Big Oil environmental movement.

While the TV show definitely offered a 'complicitous critique' of corporate and celebrity culture, to borrow Linda Hutcheon's useful phrase, the new film strikes an uneasier balance as a story about failing to thwart a hostile corporate takeover of the Muppets. This is after all a movie produced by Disney, the corporation that bought the Muppets name (and who sneak in two vainglorious helicopter shots of a *Cars 2* billboard atop the Muppets Studio). It's an intriguing, and not entirely successful, disavowal of the corporate structure of Hollywood, in order to position the Muppets brand as 'uncynical'.

Uncynical sells, of course, or Disney would never have unshelved the Muppets. Their complicit yet anti-capitalist position is, like 80s nostalgia and the importation of a bromance framework (inevitable given that screenwriter-star Jason Segel is part of the Apatow pack), a sign of the Muppets' evergreen ability to be timely: it's a film for 2012, for the 99 per cent, for the Occupiers who have been criticised as Starbucks-quaffing smartphone revolutionaries seeking a rainbow connection that could only be called 'kermunism'. **Sophie Mayer**

Puppet love: 'The Muppets'

CREDITS

Produced by
David Hoberman
Todd Lieberman
Written by
Jason Segel
Nicholas Stoller
Based on Disney's Muppet properties and characters
Director of Photography
Don Burgess
Edited by
James Thomas
Production Designer
Steve Saklad
Original Score
Christophe Beck
Sound Mixer
Steve Cantamessa
Costume Designer
Rahel Afiley
Visual Effects
Look Effects, Inc.
Centro Digital Pictures
Additional:
Shade VFX
West Wing Studios, Inc.
PJF Productions

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Production Company
Walt Disney Pictures presents
Executive Producers
Jason Segel
Nicholas Stoller
John G. Scotti
Martin G. Baker

CAST

Jason Segel
Gary
Amy Adams
Mary
Chris Cooper
Tex Richman
Rashida Jones
CDE executive
Steve Whitmire
Kermit/Beaker/Statler/Rizzo
Eric Jacobson
Miss Piggy/Fozzie Bear/Animal/Sam Eagle/Marvin Suggs
Dave Goelz
Gonzo/Dr Bunsen Honeydew/Zoot/Beauregard/Waldorf/Kermit Moopet
Bill Barretta
Swedish chef/Rowlf/Dr Teeth/Pepe the prawn/Bobo/Fozzie Moopet
David Rudman
Scooter/Janice/Miss Poogy
Matt Vogel
Sgt Floyd
Pepper/Camilla/Sweetums/80s robot/Lew Zealand/Uncle Deadly/Rowlf Moopet/Crazy Harry
Peter Linz
Walter
Alan Arkin
tour guide

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound
Colour/US prints by
DeLuxe
International prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

9,868 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Smalltown, US, the present. Muppets-obsessed Walter is offered the trip of a lifetime to Los Angeles by his brother Gary, who is taking his girlfriend Mary there for their tenth anniversary. On a tour of the neglected Muppets Studio, Walter overhears tycoon Tex Richman planning to drill for oil beneath the building, so Walter appeals to Kermit to raise $10 million to save it. Kermit determines to get the Muppet gang back together. Only Miss Piggy, now working at *Vogue Paris*, refuses to return. The Muppets clean up the theatre, persuade network executive Veronica to give them a TV telethon special and – with Miss Piggy back in charge – kidnap Jack Black to act as reluctant host. Walter seeks Gary's help in devising an act, but Gary, realising that he has neglected Mary, returns to Smalltown.

The show opens to an audience of one, but Muppet versions of songs such as 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' and 'Forget You' soon fill the theatre and get the pledges coming in. Heartened by Gary and Mary's last-minute return to thwart Richman's revenge, Walter closes the show with a spectacular performance, although the pledges still fall short. The Muppets leave the theatre to find thousands of fans awaiting them on Hollywood Boulevard. Gonzo defeats Richman, and Gary proposes to Mary.

Position Among the Stars

The Netherlands/USA 2010
Director: Leonard Retel Helmrich

Position Among the Stars is the third in a triptych of documentaries by Leonard Retel Helmrich, a Dutch filmmaker of Indonesian descent, following the day-to-day fortunes of an extended Javanese family. Like *The Eye of the Day* (2001) and *The Shape of the Moon* (2004), the final instalment is keen to place the Sjamsuddin family within Indonesia's wider historical drama. While the first two films took in the fall of President Suharto and the rise of fundamentalist Islam, the latest ruminates on Indonesia's struggle to face the demands of a global economy.

We start in a green field in grandmother Rumidjah's village. As the sun comes up, the sparkle of night-sky stars transforms into dew on leaves – bringing us into a film very attuned to nature and cosmic interconnectedness. Eschewing domineering voiceover, this gentle, impressionistic documentary glides around the minutiae of the everyday with warmth and wry humour, largely trusting the viewer to discern the broader significance of small, emblematic events. Rumidjah, collected by her son Bakti, sets off for Jakarta to ensure that her granddaughter gets into university. When she tries and fails to flag down the passing train, Bakti pulls her back from the tracks – her confoundedness at the new rule that trains can stop only at stations shorthand for the debilitation of rapid modernisation.

As we arrive at the Sjamsuddins' home in a Jakarta slum, familiar domestic dramas play out – but with a dash of strange poetry. Rumidjah's daughter-in-law is enraged by her husband's distracted attention, the object of her jealousy not another woman but his prized fighting fish. Monetary concerns are prevalent, corruption second nature. With no systematic way of gauging need, government officials take just a cursory look around family-member Dwi's house to assess his eligibility for benefits – cue a frantic scramble to hide the TV and motorbike.

The camerawork drops and soars as if with a life of its own. A creator's-eye view of sorts, it fluidly moves over people, cockroaches and inanimate objects with the same weight of curiosity, as ready to register a cat idly batting a rat's tail or a stack of lime-green gas canisters as to witness a heated conversation. The canisters prove a catalyst for controversy. Gas has been championed by the government in the face of rocketing oil prices, but panic ensues when a new stove erupts in flames in the Sjamsuddin household. "Why do they force us simple folk who don't know a thing about technology to cook on gas?" exclaims Rumidjah.

Islamic hardliners publicly agitate for Jihad on the back of the fuel issue,

though their protest is acknowledged by the family only for the roadblock it causes on the way to Tari's university interview. Although Bakti has converted the family to Islam (Rumidjah, despite his disapproval, remains a Christian), Tari's lack of knowledge of the faith's Five Pillars means that she's refused state funding – revealing official religion to be another twine in Indonesia's complex weave of values, demanding negotiation at even the most quotidian level.

When Rumidjah returns home to her village, she takes a new gas stove with her. Her elderly friend Tumisah, unable even to master switching it on, refuses the relief it offers from arduous firewood collection. "Possessions take possession of you," she tells Rumidjah, a bombshell of wisdom undercutting any patronising feelings we may have had about her resistance. Claiming satisfaction with the meagre rice helpings she lives on, she accuses Rumidjah of confused priorities, and dismisses life in Jakarta. There, she laments, you can't see the stars, because there's "too much electricity".

Carmen Gray

CREDITS

Produced by
Hetty Naaijkens-Retel Helmrich
Script
Hetty Naaijkens-Retel Helmrich
Leonard Retel Helmrich
Director of Photography
Leonard Retel Helmrich
Editing
Jasper Naaijkens
Music
Danang Faturahman
Fahmy Al-Attas
Sound Design
Ranko Paukovic

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Production Companies
Scarabeefilms presents in co-production with HUMAN Broadcasting a film by Leonard Retel Helmrich
Co-produced with HUMAN Broadcasting
With the support of Nederlands Fonds voor de Film, Stimuleringsfonds Nederlandse Culturele Mediaproducties, CoBO-fonds, Rotterdams Media Fonds, NCDO
Radcliffe Institute Fellowship Program 2009-2010, Harvard University
The development of this film was supported by the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

Dutch theatrical title
Stand van de Sterren

SYNOPSIS A documentary following the daily life of the extended Sjamsuddin family in Indonesia. Rumidjah travels from her village to Jakarta to help her granddaughter Tari, who's graduating from high school, decide her future. After Tari is denied state funding for university, Rumidjah mortgages her house to pay the fees. In the face of rising oil prices, the government gives locals cash handouts to quell dissent, and pushes them to change to gas stoves, which are feared as a fire risk. Rumidjah returns to her village, taking a new stove with her.

Rampart

USA 2011
Director: Oren Moverman
Certificate 15 108m 9s

Rampart was for some time a working title for *The Shield*, the FX cable network's visceral LAPD drama loosely based on the real-life Rampart precinct, rocked by corruption scandals in the late 1990s. Acolytes of that show's propulsive, nervy thrust – and indeed fans of the meaty, serpentine narratives of *Rampart*'s co-writer James Ellroy – may well be caught off guard by director Oren Moverman's second collaboration with Woody Harrelson (after 2009's *The Messenger*), which once again probes the inner life of a man in uniform. For this is a cold, clammy sweat of a movie – at times languidly atmospheric but pervaded by a queasy, muted sense of the walls slowly closing in around its terminally hubristic protagonist.

Dissecting ambiguous characters has been a Moverman specialty from the chameleonic Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There* (2007, co-scripted with director Todd Haynes) to Ben Foster's staff sergeant Will Montgomery in *The Messenger* – and Harrelson's LAPD veteran Dave 'Date Rape' Brown is no exception. He's saddled with his unwanted moniker after the apparently premeditated killing of a suspected serial rapist, and his unapologetically ruthless style of old-school policing is a constant embarrassment for Rampart's top brass (Moverman sets his film in 1999, when the station was virtually under siege from encamped anti-police demonstrators). When he's caught on camera delivering rough justice to a reckless driver, it's the last straw – Dave faces a civil lawsuit and is quietly urged to retire. Nonplussed, he vows to stand fast, promising to exploit his Vietnam service for all it's worth in court. Dave has also outstayed his welcome at home, a bizarre set-up that has him living in a section of two adjacent houses with two ex-wives (who happen to be sisters) and a pair of daughters, one from each marriage.

But this isn't your average dirty cop. Dave is more nuanced than, say, Abel Ferrara or Werner Herzog's bad lieutenants. Despite his thuggery and narcissism, he's well-read, often eloquent and quick-witted, sometimes even charming. He delivers bigoted quips that would make Harry Callahan blanch, but claims not to be a racist ("I hate all people equally") and has a Manichean view of justice and punishment, blaming Rampart's ignominy on a bunch of "Rodney King wannabes".

Moverman and Ellroy have this alpha male constantly challenged and upbraided by women: his fractured family (who deride him as a dinosaur), an exasperated superior (Sigourney Weaver) and a forlorn lawyer, Linda (Robin Wright), with whom he begins an uneasy affair. As Dave sinks into a fog of boozy, druggy paranoia, fearing that Linda is investigating him and that higher powers are setting him up, Harrelson's superbly controlled

Cop strop: Woody Harrelson

performance – his best work to date – comes into its own. Never off the screen, he skilfully limns his character's slide from cocksure egotist to hollow desperado. And as snapshots of impotent male rage go, Dave's screaming/splashing tantrum in his lover's swimming pool and a gruesome nightclub bacchanal are up there with Jake LaMotta's prison meltdown in *Raging Bull* (1980) or a mewling Harvey Keitel in Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* (1992).

Reportedly, Ellroy's original script was extensively rewritten by Moverman – Ellroy's acrid tone survives but there are uneven patches, and some scenes fail to take off dramatically. Moverman's direction is unhurried and restrained, though he perhaps employs one too many moody profile shots of Harrelson listlessly driving his patrol car. Some will scratch their heads at the film's muffled anti-resolution, yet it seems only logical for a man whose existence has reached an impasse. It's not always satisfying, but *Rampart* is uncompromising to the last.

Matthew Taylor

CREDITS

Produced by
Lawrence Inglee
Clark Peterson
Ben Foster
Ken Kao
Written by
James Ellroy
Oren Moverman
Director of Photography
Bobby Bukowski
Edited by
Jay Rabinowitz
Production Designer
David Wasco
Music
Dickon Hinchliffe
Sound Designer
Javier Bennassar
Costume Designer
Catherine George

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Production Companies
Lightstream Pictures presents a Waypoint Entertainment production in association with The Third Mind Pictures
Executive Producers
Michael DeFranco
Lila Yacoub
Mark Gordon
Paul Currie
Garrett Kelleher

CAST

Woody Harrelson
David Douglas Brown
Ned Beatty
Hartshorn
Francis Capra
Seize Chasco
Ben Foster
General Terry
Anne Heche
Catherine
Ice Cube
Kyle Timkins
Brie Larson
Helen
Audra McDonald
Sarah
Cynthia Nixon
Barbara
Sigourney Weaver
Joan Confrey
Robert Wisdom
captain
Robin Wright
Linda Fentress
Steve Buscemi
Bill Blago

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

9,738 ft + 8 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, 1999. Dave 'Date Rape' Brown – nicknamed after his allegedly premeditated execution of a suspected rapist – is a veteran cop stationed at Rampart, a police precinct mired in corruption scandals. He lives in adjacent houses with his two ex-wives, sisters Catherine and Barbara, and his two daughters. When Dave's brutal beating of a reckless driver is caught on camera, he faces suspension and a civil lawsuit. His superiors urge him to retire, but Dave is determined to fight his corner. He begins an affair with lawyer Linda Fentress, though he suspects her of investigating him. After Dave asks retired cop Hartshorn to pull strings for him, his suspension is rescinded. Barbara asks Dave to move out, and insists that the houses be sold. Broke, Dave consults Hartshorn, who suggests raiding a gang's high-stakes poker game. Dave arrives to discover a robbery already in progress; he shoots dead one of the perpetrators and pockets the cash. Dave lies to a police inquest into the shooting. Hartshorn rejects as paranoia Dave's claim that he was set up. Dave is shadowed by internal investigator Timkins, who vows to prosecute him. Dave's relationship with Linda breaks down when Dave learns that a regular informant – the sole witness to the shooting – talked to her. Dave leaves Hartshorn to die when he suffers a heart attack. He gives Timkins a taped confession of his prior misdemeanours but omits the poker shooting. Furious, Timkins lets Dave go.

Red Dog

Australia/USA 2010
Director: Kriv Stenders
Certificate PG 92m 4s

"The whole world in an hour and half" was how Jean Luc Godard described *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), Robert Bresson's portrait of an imperturbable donkey bearing witness to, and suffering from, mankind's cruelty. Like that austere masterpiece, *Red Dog* is built around an animal protagonist, in this case an Australian Kelpie (a red-haired, pointy-eared sheepdog), but there unfortunately the similarities end. Directed by the Australian Kriv Stenders, it's an old-fashioned family film which sentimentally harks back to the likes of *Lassie*. Bucking contemporary trends, its intrepid canine hero (played by Koko) isn't granted the power of speech, and CGI effects are used sparingly.

The source material is a collection of short stories by *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* author Louis de Bernières, constituting an imagined biography of a real-life dog whose statue the writer noticed on a book tour in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Structured around a series of flashbacks in which the residents of the isolated mining town of Dampier remember Red Dog and his antics, the film is concerned with how the animal helped to unite this outpost of civilisation in the wilderness. Befriended by all and sundry, he is partly responsible for the excitable Italian Vanno (Arthur Angel) marrying local veterinary assistant Rose (an underused Keisha Castle-Hughes), and rescues the melancholic Jocko (Rohan Nichol) from a shark attack.

Dampier itself serves as a metaphor for 1970s Australia, with rough-hewn men toiling away in the heat, untroubled by health-and-safety requirements (Jeremy Clarkson would surely approve of its depiction of blue-collar, coarse-humoured masculinity). The widescreen compositions of cinematographer Geoffrey Hall make strong use of the dirt-red Outback landscapes and brilliant blue skies. Koko himself is a robust performer: check out his screening test on YouTube for evidence of his emotional range.

However, the central romance between the American John and local girl Nancy is strictly by the book, illustrating the beauty apartheid defining so much mainstream cinema. No surprise then that Rachael Taylor's Nancy, with her blonde model looks, should fall for Josh Lucas's easy-on-the-eye John. Nor that, following the latter's demise, she should swiftly find love with truck driver Tom, another conventionally attractive male, in the film's framing story. Whereas Bresson's long-suffering Balthazar died so memorably in a field to the accompaniment of Schubert's Andantino, Red Dog's own death feels perfunctory, given that he's simply replaced by an identical-looking puppy.

Australian cinema completists should note that Noah Taylor and Loene Carmen, here playing a bar-owner and his wife, are cast together for the first time since *The Year My Voice Broke* in 1987, and that the film includes a brief final screen performance from that ultra-dependable ocker character actor Bill Hunter, who impressed in the likes of *Strictly Ballroom*, *Muriel's Wedding* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. **Thomas Dawson**

CREDITS

Producers
Nelson Woss
Julie Ryan
Screenplay
Daniel Taplitz
Based on the book by Louis de Bernières
Director of Photography
Geoffrey Hall
Editor
Jill Bilcock
Production Designer
Ian Gracie
Music
Cezary Skubiszewski
Sound Recordist
James Currie
Costume Designer
Mariot Kerr

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Production Companies
Screen Australia, Endymion Films and Essential Entertainment present in association with ScreenWest and LotteryWest and South Australian Film Corporation a Woss Group production Produced with assistance from South Australian Film Corporation Produced and developed with the assistance of ScreenWest and LotteryWest
Executive Producers
Aaron Ryder
Daniel Taplitz
Su Armstrong
Graham Burke
Joel Pearlman
Randy Hermann
John Fremes
Ron Woss

CAST

Josh Lucas
John
Rachael Taylor
Nancy
Rohan Nichol
Jocko
Luke Ford
Tom
Arthur Angel
Vanno
John Batchelor
Peeto
Keisha Castle-Hughes
Rose
Noah Taylor
Jack
Loene Carmen
Maureen
Koko
Red Dog
Paul Blackwell
Mr Cribbage
Jacqy Phillips
Mrs Cribbage

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
G2 Pictures

8,286 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Western Australia, 1979. Truck driver Tom stops in the remote mining town of Dampier, where he discovers that a red-haired sheepdog is dying of strychnine poisoning. Various locals explain why the animal, known as Red Dog, is so important to their community. The dog was found roaming the local countryside ten years earlier by publican Jack and his wife Maureen. The dog was befriended by several of the miners, including the imposing Peeto, Italian émigré Vanno and the brooding Jocko, but he became particularly devoted to John, an American working as a bus driver for the Hamersley Iron company; John was engaged to Nancy, the firm's secretary. Through a series of anecdotes, Tom discovers that Red Dog relished hitchhiking and duelling with his feline adversary Red Cat, and that he was disliked by caravan-site owners the Cribbages. When John is killed in a motorbike accident, Red Dog spends weeks waiting for him to return and travels to Japan in a fruitless bid to track him down. Finally the poisoned dog dies in front of John's former home. A year later, Tom, who is now Nancy's partner, returns to Dampier with a statue dedicated to Red Dog and a replacement puppy.

The Topp Twins Untouchable Girls

New Zealand 2009
Director: Leanne Pooley

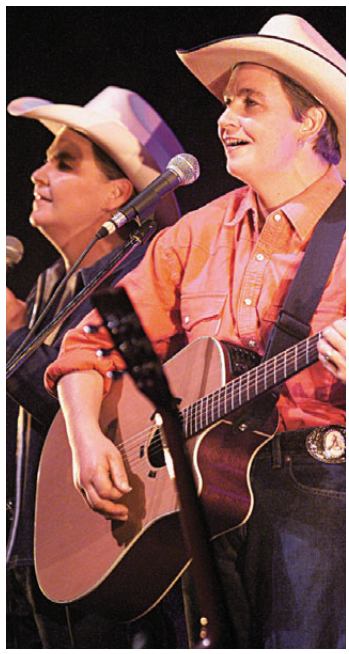
Leanne Pooley's documentary *The Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* charts the rise of New Zealand yodelling lesbian sisters Jools and Lynda Topp from street busking to primetime television and cultural icon status in their own country. Stylistically, Pooley's film is far from innovative, but this suits the Topps' provincial charm; more than simply a fan tribute, the film is an intriguing social document examining the phenomenon of the twins' unlikely mainstream appeal, and how they have used it to agitate for political change. In local box-office terms, the documentary is New Zealand's most successful yet, indicating the twins' continuing popularity.

In early 1980s New Zealand, when male homosexuality was still illegal, the very out-of-the-closet Topps found popularity among sheep farmers, ladies-who-lunch and hardcore activists alike. While the media usually only featured lesbians who had murdered, been murdered or committed suicide (Peter Jackson's 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures* depicts one infamous case), the girls' cheery rural image seemed unthreatening to this agricultural nation, their songs – such as 'Calf Club Day' – infused with a genuine affection for their dairy-farm upbringing. Archive footage from Television New Zealand shows them aged 24, on the farm where they were living with their respective girlfriends, the presenter commenting: "They sing about homosexuality, and people don't seem to mind, perhaps because they look wholesome and have such an irrepressible sense of fun."

Excerpts from the Topps' on-stage shows provide intimate, anecdotal insights into their lives. With endearingly candid openness they talk about their parents' struggle to accept their coming-out, and about Jools's recent cancer battle. We also encounter their comedy-act alter egos: blokey farmers Ken and Ken, Camp Mother and Camp Leader, the Bowling Ladies and posh socialites Prue and Dilly Ramsbottom. Though satire is involved, these incarnations don't so much send up other social groups as inclusively gain trust through infiltrating them. The film recalls a fascinating incident when the Topps, in drag as Ken and Ken, were invited by farmers to share a table at a Showgirls strip club, where they all had a riotous night leering at the pole-dancing.

The Topps have used this acceptance to challenge the orthodoxy. Interviewed for the film, former prime minister Helen Clark says that their vocal backing of the 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Act helped make it a mainstream issue, while archival footage of the Springbok tour protests, anti-nuclear rallies and the Bastion Point Maori land-rights occupation shows the Topps' commitment to the biggest nation-defining causes of the day. "They were very visible, very outspoken and fearless," says Maori activist Mereana Pitman.

While its publicity and promotion may hook superficially curious audiences by touting circus-like rarity in the form of the world's only yodelling lesbian twins, the film itself eschews cheap sensationalism to depict the Topps' strength of character – a deeper human anomaly. **Carmen Gray**



Sister act: the Topp twins

SYNOPSIS A documentary about New Zealand comic singers Jools and Lynda Topp, aka the Topp Twins. The film combines archive television footage, interviews and recent stage-show excerpts to chart the lesbian duo's career and sociopolitical impact (notably their involvement in the 1981 Springbok Tour protests, the 1982 Bastion Point land-rights occupation and 1984's anti-nuclear rallies). The sisters are interviewed as themselves and in character as their alter egos. The film also follows Jools's successful cancer treatment.

CREDITS

Produced by
Arani Cuthbert
Directors of Photography
Wayne Vinten
Leon Narbey
Edited by
Tim Woodhouse
Art Department
Jane Cresswell
Original Music Written and Performed by
Lynda and Jools Topp
Sound Design
Chris Burt

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Production Companies
A Diva Films production in association with The New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand on Air, Sweeney Vesty

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
November Films

Underworld Awakening

USA 2012
Directors: Mårlind & Stein
Certificate 18 88m 25s

Like the *Resident Evil* series, which is similarly built around a corset-clad action babe fighting monsters, the *Underworld* saga produces lookalike instalments at regular intervals, always leaving a few stray plot threads dangling to ensure follow-ups. Each sequel has to have a couple of hooks to go with the business-as-usual stuff. Here, inevitably, *Underworld* switches to 3D and naturally goes with an old-fashioned clutching-hand/breaking-glass/flying-objects mode of made-you-duck exploitation dimensionality.

Original star Kate Beckinsale, who was only briefly in the historical flashback threequel *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* (2009), returns to her signature role of Selene, who is an outfit (tight shiny trousers, corset, Matrix trenchcoat, guns as accessories) and a hairstyle (over the eyes, not that practical for a sharpshooter) rather than a character. Selene has a few private tearful moments lamenting her (temporarily) lost love and coping with her newfound mother status, but spends most of the film (as before) striding towards camera in slow-mo, jumping off high places to land like a cat or being flung across rooms by werewolves.

Set in a nameless night-time city (American, rather than the European locales of the first *Underworld* films) and in a contextless near future with the usual fascist goon squads, *Underworld: Awakening* balances the franchise's werewolf-sympathetic last instalment by siding with its few somewhat weedy vampires (Charles Dance replaces Bill Nighy as the King of the Undead and spends all his screen time arguing that they should stay in hiding) against unequivocally nasty lycanthropes (Stephen Rea bumps out Michael Sheen as a black-eyed werewolf mad scientist). With Mans Marlin and Bjorn Stein (auteurs of the odd Swedish genre movie *Storm* and the frankly lunatic Julianne Moore vehicle *Shelter*) working from a script part-authored by series originator Len Wiseman and comics/*Babylon 5* creator J. Michael Straczynski, this manages to be as ludicrous, anonymous and unresonant as the entire franchise to date. Its monsters are masses of growling, weightless pixels and its fight scenes feature semi-indestructible creatures tossing each other around to little effect, while an emphasis on car chases (with werewolves chasing traffic) makes for a lot of scurrying back and forth but not much actual plot movement.

It seems possible that similar franchises are melding: besides her role in the *Resident Evil* films, Milla Jovovich played a Selene-like vampire hitwoman in 2006's forgettable *Ultra Violet*; the business with an evil corporation's programme of experiments on supernatural creatures and bad scientists' attempts to exploit the heroine's unnaturally born offspring is straight out of the *Resident Evil* playbook. It's also seldom a good sign when the big stunt at the climax has been appropriated from somewhere else: this gets rid of its 'indestructible werewolf' (a Hulk-sized big bad) with a gimmick (taking advantage of the rapid healing powers that make the creature seem unbeatable, Selene shoves a grenade into an open wound which seals the bomb inside its torso – shredding the werewolf when it goes off) copped blatantly from Michael Oblowitz's *The Breed* (2001).

While the existence of *Priest* (2011) means that *Underworld: Awakening* isn't the worst futuristic 3D vampire movie on the market, it would do better not to remind cognoscenti of *The Breed*, a vampire *noir*/SF/mystery which (like similarly underrated one-offs *Perfect Creature* and *Daybreakers*) seemed to offer much more apparent spinoff potential than Wiseman's bland effort, but didn't manage to found a franchise.

Kim Newman

If Lycan, you can: Kate Beckinsale

CREDITS

Directors
Mårlind & Stein
[i.e. Måns Mårlind, Björn Stein]
Produced by
Tom Rosenberg
Gary Lucchesi
Len Wiseman
Richard Wright
Screenplay
Len Wiseman
John Hlavin
J. Michael Straczynski
Allison Burnett
Story
Len Wiseman
John Hlavin
Based on characters created by Kevin Grevioux, Len Wiseman, Danny McBride
Director of Photography
Scott Kevan

Editor
Jeff McEvoy
Production Designer
Claude Paré
Music
Paul Haslinger
Sound Designer
Michael Babcock
Costume Designer
Monique Proudhomme

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Production Companies
Screen Gems and Lakeshore Entertainment present a Lakeshore Entertainment production in association with Sketch Films
Executive Producers
David Kern
James McQuaide
David Coatsworth
Eric Reid
Skip Williamson
Henry Winterstein

CAST

Kate Beckinsale
Selene
Stephen Rea
Dr Jacob Lane
Michael Ealy
Detective Sebastian
Theo James
David
India Eisley
Eve
Sandrine Holt
Lida
Charles Dance
Thomas
Adam Greydon Reid
med tech 1
Kris Holden-Ried
Quint
Catlin Adams
Olivia

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

7,957 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS With humanity aware that vampires and werewolves ('Lycans') are real, a purge of these creatures begins. Vampire warrior Selene and her lover Michael Corvin, a vampire-werewolf hybrid, are attacked by humans and caught in an explosion. Twelve years later, Selene is released from cryogenic suspension to find herself in Antigen Laboratories, a facility run by Dr Jacob Lane, who is supposedly working on a cure for vampirism and lycanthropy after losing his son to a werewolf bite. Selene has been released by Eve, a child who is in fact her own daughter, a hybrid like her father. They escape Antigen with the aid of vampire David, whose clan is in hiding. Despite the arguments of David's father Thomas, the clan shelters Selene and Eve; the lair is attacked by werewolves, among them a gigantic creature immune to silver bullets. Selene survives but Eve is recaptured by Lane, who turns out to be a Lycan himself (the giant werewolf is Quint, his son), intent on wiping out his kind's ancient vampire enemies. With the help of Sebastian, a vampire-friendly policeman, and David, Selene mounts an attack on the Antigen laboratory to rescue her daughter. In the building, she finds Michael, still frozen, and starts the process of reviving him. She defeats Lane and Quint and rescues Eve, but finds Michael has been abducted again. She vows to get him back and restore the vampire race to its former position of power.

The Woman in Black

USA/United Kingdom/Canada/Sweden 2011
Director: James Watkins

The most frightening thing in the world is nothing to do with gory splatter, CG monsters or 3D trickery – it's the thought of something bad happening to your child. That was the fundamental truth exploited by Susan Hill when she wrote her 1983 ghost story, and that's what director James Watkins and screen adapter Jane Goldman clearly understood equally well when they set out to make this new film version. Mind you, it doesn't do any harm if you can supplement that primal parental terror by locating it in a cobwebby gothic mansion with en-suite graveyard, full of secrets and things that go bump in the night...

As part of a relaunch of the Hammer brand, *The Woman in Black* gives notice of the company's return to its classic strengths as a purveyor of deadpan but terrifically entertaining period frightfests. Daniel Radcliffe plays buttoned-up Edwardian solicitor Arthur Kipps, a widower still mourning for his wife and unable to connect with his young son. Dispatched by his London law firm to investigate the will of a reclusive old lady, he travels to a time-locked village in the Fens, peopled by superstitious locals who do all they can to deflect him from his mission. Encouraged by the one rationalist he meets (Ciarán Hinds), he insists on staying the night in the dead woman's creepy old house, and encounters the spectre of the title, whose appearance is believed to herald the death of a child.

The story is already well known to London theatregoers in the form of a long-running adaptation by Stephen Mallatratt, but Goldman's screenplay returns to Hill's source novel, only tweaking it to emphasise Arthur's grief-stricken distance from the land of the living. All the same, as soon as he enters Eel Marsh House, Arthur's backstory ceases to matter as much as the skilfully ratcheted tension and briskly effective shocks that accompany his forensic detective work. Even old chestnuts like the rocking chair that rocks itself, or the spooky face appearing in a window, are handled with enough dexterity to make them freshly frightening. Quicksand, fog, graves that must be opened, toys that seem to hold your gaze... there's no undead horror commonplace that can't be reanimated in this film.

As Radcliffe's post-Potter calling card, it's a safe but unarresting choice. His wizard work involved plenty of similar opportunities to poke about in dark corners, and since there's very little dialogue for large swathes of this film, it doesn't prove much about his ability to handle an emotionally complex scene. Still, it's not every young actor who could carry a film with such confidence. In the wrong hands, Arthur could just have been

In a manor of spooking: Daniel Radcliffe

an annoying idiot (because who else spends the night in an obviously haunted house?) but Radcliffe manages to convey enough of his character's frozen, damaged interior to make us agree to believe that he really needs to get to the bottom of the mystery.

There's no big, profound truth being propounded here and thankfully no heartwarming take-home message. You get exactly what you hope to get from the best Hammer films: a thoroughly enjoyable hour and a half of jumps, screams and prickling neck-hair. **Lisa Mullen**

CREDITS

Produced by
Richard Jackson
Simon Oakes
Brian Oliver
Screenplay
Jane Goldman
Based on the novel by
Susan Hill
Director of Photography
Tim Maurice-Jones
Editor
Jon Harris
Production Designer
Kave Quinn
Music
Marco Beltrami
Sound Mixer
Ivor Talbot
Costume Designer
Keith Madden
Visual Effects
Filmgate
Union VFX

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Production Companies
Alliance Films, Hammer and the UK Film Council present a Talisman production in association with Cross Creek Pictures, Exclusive Media Group
Co-produced by Filmgate Films and Film i Väst
Executive Producers
Guy East
Nigel Sinclair
Tobin Armbrust
Marc Schipper
Neil Dunn
Xavier Marchand
Tyler Thompson
Roy Lee

CAST

Daniel Radcliffe
Arthur Kipps
Ciarán Hinds
Daily
Janet McTeer
Mrs Daily
Liz White
Jennet Humfrye, the woman in black
Roger Allam
Mr Bentley
Tim McMullan
Mr Jerome
Jessica Raine
nanny
Daniel Cerquiera
Keckwick
Shaun Dooley
Fisher
Mary Stockley
Mrs Fisher
David Burke
PC Collins

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

SYNOPSIS Edwardian England. Arthur Kipps, a young London solicitor, is mourning his dead wife when he is forced to leave his young son behind and travel to a remote village to investigate a disputed will. Arranging for his son to follow on in a few days, he sets about trying to discover the truth about the recently deceased old lady and her dead son. Fighting strong local opposition, he determines to stay at the old woman's house until he has examined all her paperwork.

After a series of mysterious hauntings, Arthur manages to open the locked door of an abandoned nursery and discovers that the old woman had adopted her sister's illegitimate child, who then died in an accident in the boggy ground surrounding the house. The sister vowed to get her revenge from beyond the grave, and the appearance of her black-clad spirit now heralds the death of a child.

Arthur exhumes the child's body and calls up the ghost to reunite mother and son. Thinking that the danger is past, he meets his own son at the railway station. But the black-clad woman appears, and both Arthur and his son are crushed by a train. In death, they are reunited with Arthur's wife – but the Woman in Black is still not appeased.

An American in Paris: Kristin Scott Thomas, Ethan Hawke

The Woman in the Fifth

France/United Kingdom/ Poland 2011
Director: Pawel Pawlikowski
Certificate 15 83m 46s

The Woman in the Fifth, loosely based on Douglas Kennedy's 2007 novel, sits uneasily between the psychological thriller of its literary source and the European art-cinema style of director Pawel Pawlikowski (*Last Resort*, *My Summer of Love*). Equally, it veers from a potentially clever take on the clichéd trope of the 'distressed American in Paris' to simply exploiting it.

The film's opening, in which all-American novelist Tom Ricks (Ethan Hawke) lands in Paris and is immediately thrown into the city's criminal underbelly, recalls Harrison Ford's similar fate in Roman Polanski's *Frantic* (1988). But where Polanski kept the viewer hooked through fast-paced narration and gripping mystery, Pawlikowski meanders between family drama (Tom has come to Paris to be reunited with his six-year-old daughter Chloé), a criminal subplot, and Tom's love affairs with two women. One of these affairs is with mysterious, half-French, half-Romanian femme fatale Margit (Kristin Scott Thomas), the other with Ania (Joanna Kulig), a Polish waitress at the sordid hotel where Tom is forced to stay when all his money is stolen. While this arguably turns the film into a more ambitious project, the execution fails to make the disparate elements gel; and with many of the novel's twists and turns omitted – as well as backstories such as the reason Tom lost his job in the US – mystery gives way to confusion.

When Tom's estranged wife Nathalie (Delphine Chuillot) violently rejects him and calls the police, Tom starts lurking around parks, spying on Chloé as she plays with other children. This is part of a leitmotif connected with the gaze: a recurrent, inexplicable (until the end of the film) shot of little Chloé with her pink-rimmed glasses in the woods; Tom putting on and taking off his own glasses; and his mysterious surveillance job for Sezer (Samir Guesmi), the shady boss of his hotel. It's hard, however, to extract much more meaning out of this thematic thread. At best, some of the unexplained shots of nature (Chloé in the woods, branches, insects) achieve, in their departure from naturalism, the kind of eerie poetry for which Pawlikowski is renowned, but at worst the film indulges in cliché. For example, Tom's thick, black-rimmed glasses, of which heavy play is made, in the end seem to function only as a stereotypical cue to his status as an 'intellectual'. But in the end Hawke fails to suggest a credible down-and-out writer in Paris. Nor, though he conducts liaisons with two beautiful women, does he match the romantic hero he incarnated in Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995) and *Before Sunset* (2004). Female characters don't fare any better. Ania isn't sufficiently developed for Kulig to do much with the part, and while Margit is more fleshed out, concentrating the film's Central European mixture of realism and the uncanny, ultimately she's a two-dimensional figure, saddled with fake profound dialogue.

Too slowly paced for a thriller and too sketchy for a complex art film, *The Woman in the Fifth* clumsily inhabits the border between reality and fantasy. The viewer is left wondering if Tom is either mad or an unreliable narrator whose scrawled ramblings – which, in another clichéd gesture, he throws in a bin – we have been following. Yet what might have been a profound reflection on fictional narration ends up seeming trite, and at times even comic. Ultimately, though, the main problem may be the film's lack of precise anchorage. In *Last Resort* and *My Summer of Love*, a poetic dimension linked to the characters' dreams and fantasies was harnessed to a strong sense of place (a seaside town in southern England in the first, Yorkshire in the second). Despite its title, which refers to Paris's fifth arrondissement, *The Woman in the Fifth* departs from familiar Parisian iconography such as boulevard and cafes, although, perhaps with an eye to publicity, the Eiffel Tower figures in the background when Tom and Margit meet for the first time. Instead, the film gives us a lower-depths dystopia of heavily tagged railway yards and a squalid hotel populated by racist stereotypes: North Africans are criminals and black Africans don't know how to flush a toilet. But the fact that the film fails to offer any graspable sense of the city is perhaps unsurprising since, in his own words, Pawlikowski wanted to make it look like "Eastern Europe in the 1970s". No wonder characters and viewers are equally lost in it. **Ginette Vincendeau**

CREDITS

Produced by
Caroline Benjo
Carole Scotta
Screenplay
Pawel Pawlikowski
Based on the novel by
Douglas Kennedy
Director of Photography
Ryszard Lenczewski
Editor
David Charap
Production Designer
Benoit Barouh
Music
Max de Wardener
Sound Mixer
Nicolas Cantin
Costume Designers
Julian Day
Shaida Day

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Production Companies
Haut et Court and Film4 present in association with UK Film Council a co-production with SPI International Poland and The Bureau
With the participation of Canal+, Orange Cinema Series, Haut et Court Distribution, Artificial Eye
In association with Memento Films International, Coficup - Backup Films, La Banque Postale Image 4, Soficinema 6, Polish Film Institute
A film by Pawel Pawlikowski
A co-production Haut et Court, Film4, SPI International Poland, The Bureau
In association with UK Film Council
A Polish Film Institute co-financed production
With the support of I2I, a MEDIA programme of the European Union
Developed with the support of Cofinova 2

CAST

Ethan Hawke
Tom
Kristin Scott Thomas
Margit
Joanna Kulig
Ania
Samir Guesmi
Sezer
Delphine Chuillot
Nathalie
Julie Papillon
Chloe
Geoffrey Carey
Laurent
Mamadou Minté
Omar
Mohamed Aroussi
Moussa
Jean-Louis Cassarino
Dumont
Judith Burnett
Lorraine L'herbert

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

7,539 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
La femme du Vème

SYNOPSIS Present day. American novelist Tom Ricks arrives in Paris to renew contact with his six-year-old daughter Chloé and estranged French wife Nathalie, who rejects him. Robbed of his possessions, Tom ends up in a sordid hotel run by Sezer. At night, Tom works as a watchman for Sezer's mysterious criminal operation; during the day he spies on Chloé in public parks. At a literary soiree he meets Margit, a glamorous widow, and begins an affair with her. Tom also sleeps with Sezer's mistress Ania. He is warned by Omar, his hostile neighbour at the hotel, that Sezer will seek revenge. Omar is found brutally killed and Tom is arrested. When Tom cites his evening with Margit as an alibi, he is informed that she committed suicide in 1991. Later Sezer is arrested and Tom moves in with Ania, though he continues to 'see' Margit. His daughter disappears but is subsequently found and reunited with her mother. Tom throws material he's been writing into a bin and returns to Margit's apartment, suggesting either his madness or that the whole story took place in his imagination.

X Night of Vengeance

Australia 2010
Director: Jon Hewitt
Certificate 18 75m 59s

Jon Hewitt's *X* is a functional, fast-moving, low-budget Australian thriller, made in such brisk fashion that it takes a little while to realise how preposterous and far-fetched its storyline really is. Its depiction of prostitution is clearly more rooted in other genre films than in the reality of life on the streets of Kings Cross, Sydney's red-light district.

Director Hewitt and writer Belinda McClory take an approach to their subject-matter that is by turns romanticised and very grim. In the early scenes, in which high-class escort Holly (Viva Bianca) is practising her French and performing for well-to-do clients, we seem to have stumbled into the world of *Belle de jour*. By complete contrast, the experiences of runaway Shay (Hanna Mangan-Lawrence), selling sex on the streets or hiding away in a junkie-infested motel, are squalid in the extreme.

With crooked cops betraying crooked cops, the plotting becomes ever more convoluted, and we're never quite sure whether it's diamonds or drugs they're after. The film isn't extreme or hardboiled enough to qualify as an exploitation picture in, say, the Abel Ferrara mould. Nor, despite the fleeting and voyeuristic use of nudity, is this an erotic thriller. There is a lingering suspicion that the talented cast are slumming it – Bianca and Mangan-Lawrence both have mainstream careers and aren't natural casting in genre fare like this. Hewitt does have a flair for directing action, however. He throws in multiple chase sequences and one or two very brutal fights – at one point we see Holly battering the face of a cop who's just beaten her up, and there's a grim sequence in which someone is smothered with a polythene bag and pistol-whipped to death.

The filmmakers show plenty of visual inventiveness, using split screen and plenty of handheld camera and CCTV footage, while shooting nighttime Sydney in evocative style.

Love for sale: 'X Night of Vengeance'

The problem is that the storytelling has no depth. All the characters – from the call girl yearning to escape to the psychopathic cops – are stubbornly one-dimensional, and we're never sure what the women's underlying motivations are. All that is clear is that they have to keep on running, that they can't trust anyone they meet, and that the next violent set-piece is only a few moments away. **Geoffrey Macnab**

CREDITS

Producer
Lizzette Atkins
Screenplay
Belinda McClory
Jon Hewitt
Director of Photography
Mark Pugh
Editor
Cindy Clarkson
Production Designer
Michelle Sotheren
Music
J. David Franzke
Byron J. Scullin
Sound
J. David Franzke
Byron J. Scullin
Costume Design
Vanessa Loh

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Production Companies
Screen Australia presents in association with Film Victoria, Circe Films, Rough Beast a Circe Films production
Developed in association with Screen Australia
Produced and developed with the assistance of Film Victoria

CAST

Viva Bianca
Holly Rowe
Hanna Mangan-Lawrence
Shay Ryan
Peter Docker
Ligurian
Stephen Phillips
Bennett
Eamon Farren
Harry
Belinda McClory
Katherine/Marilyn
Darren Moss
Giles
Freya Tingley
Cindy
Anthony Phelan
customer
Hazem Shammas
Willie
Wayne Blair
Bob
Billie Rose Prichard
Rose

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

8,061 ft +0 frames

Onscreen title
X

SYNOPSIS Sydney, Australia, the present. High-class call girl Holly is about to start a new life in Paris and has only one more night of prostitution to get through. Teenage runaway Shay is homeless; desperate for money, she starts street walking. She enrages other prostitutes by stealing their customers and is badly beaten.

One of Holly's clients has asked for two women. If she doesn't take the job, she won't have enough money to get to Paris. She spots Shay on the street and recruits her. While the two women are with the client, he meets a contact in an adjoining room. The contact kills the client. Realising that Holly and Shay witnessed the murder, the killer comes after them but they escape. A sympathetic taxi driver befriends Shay.

The killer finds Holly and beats her up but she escapes again. Shay hides out in a motel in the city's red-light district. Holly is captured by the killer. She realises that he's a police officer named Bennett. He now wants Shay; he spots her, but the two women again escape and this time seek refuge with Holly's friend, another policeman. Bennett turns up; the two cops fight and Bennett is killed. The other policeman makes the women drive him away at gunpoint. They crash, and the policeman is killed; Holly is mortally wounded too. Shay, who has the briefcase the policemen were fighting over, is picked up by the kindly taxi driver. The briefcase is full of diamonds.

Young Adult

USA 2011
Director: Jason Reitman
Certificate 15 93m 32s

Young Adult is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page56.

CREDITS

Produced by
Lianne Halfon
Russell Smith
Diablo Cody
Mason Novick
Jason Reitman
Written by
Diablo Cody
Director of Photography
Eric Steelberg
Film Editor
Dana E. Glauberman
Production Designer
Kevin Thompson
Costume Designer
David Robinson
Music
Rolfe Kent
Sound Mixer
Ken Ishii

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Production Companies
Paramount Pictures and Mandate Pictures present a Mr. Mudd production in association with Right of Way Films and Denver & Delilah Films
A film by Jason Reitman

Executive Producers
Nathan Kahane
John Malkovich
Steven Rales
Helen Estabrook

CAST

Charlize Theron
Mavis Gary
Patton Oswalt
Matt Freehauf
Patrick Wilson
Buddy Slade
Elizabeth Reaser
Beth Slade
Jill Eikenberry
Hedda Gary
Mary Beth Hurt
Jan
Collette Wolfe
Sandra Freehauf
Richard Bekins
David Gary

Dolby Digital/DataSat Digital Sound/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

8,418 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Minneapolis, the present. Mavis Gary is approaching middle age, but she's still living as she did when she first moved triumphantly to the city as an ex-prom queen with a big future. Waking up hungover after yet another grim one-night stand, she opens an email announcing the birth of her old flame Buddy's first baby. He's now happily married and still living in the small town where they both grew up. But the email resparks dormant passion, and Mavis decides to reclaim her old boyfriend.

She drives back to her old home town, where she works on seducing Buddy, while spending her evenings with another former schoolmate, Matt. Always the class loser, Matt was savagely beaten by bullies at high school and still has physical and emotional problems, but Mavis is too wrapped up in her own woes to care.

A series of failed seduction attempts culminate in a drunken outburst at the baby's christening party, where Mavis tells the assembled well-wishers that she was once pregnant with Buddy's baby, but miscarried – hence her insistence that she was his real love. Buddy finally tells her once and for all that there is no hope of them ever being together. In despair Mavis goes to Matt's house, where she and Matt have an awkward sexual encounter. In the morning, she returns to the city, no wiser than she was when she left.

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CLOSE UP

Jolly melancholy

Ozu's early comedies are full of slapstick and pratfalls – but they're also tinged with regret, as **Philip Kemp** *discovers*

The Student Comedies – Four Silent Films by Yasujiro Ozu

Days of Youth/I Graduated, But... (fragment)/I Flunked, But.../The Lady and the Beard/Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth?

Japan; 1929/29/30/31/32; BFI/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 99/11/62/71/82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'Ozu – Emotion and Poetry', illustrated booklet

Campus comedy: 'I Graduated, But...'

To those who, like most of us, came to Ozu Yasujiro through the austere, minimalist work of his masterly final period, this two-disc set of some of his earliest surviving films may come as quite a shock. Beside the gentle autumnal melancholy of 'Tokyo Story' (1953) or 'The End of Summer' (1961), these 'student comedies' are often light-hearted, even frivolous, rife with slapstick, pratfalls, comic dances and nansensu (nonsense) dialogue. Late Ozu famously set his camera at a tatami-mat-sitter's height, observing his characters in mid-shot as they talk, cutting from one fixed position to the next; in these films the camera gaily tracks and pans, while conversations, often as not, are covered in shot/counter-shot.

Similarly, Ozu is widely regarded as the most 'Japanese' of his country's major directors, especially in contrast to the supposedly 'westernised' Kurosawa. But this batch of silent comedies (like Mizoguchi, Ozu shunned sound until well into the 1930s) cheerfully flaunt their western references: Hollywood film posters (especially those of Ozu's favourites Borzage and Harold Lloyd) adorn his students' walls along with US university pennants; ski resorts bear pseudo-Swiss names; and at one point a pack of Sun-Maid raisins is so prominently displayed as to suggest product placement. Ozu himself even shows up in the screenwriting credits

The films are often light-hearted, even frivolous. The camera gaily tracks and pans

of 'The Lady and the Beard' under the Anglo-Japanese pseudonym of 'James Maki'. Besides paying friendly homage to his US cinematic influences, Ozu was surely reflecting contemporary reality, with a fascination for all things western then at its height among Japan's urban youth.

Modern life was always what interested Ozu; apart from his now lost debut film 'Sword of Penitence' (1927), assigned to him by his studio Shochiku, he didn't make period dramas. Samurai and swordplay, it seems, never attracted him in the least, though he does kick off 'The Lady and the Beard' with a formally staged duel with bamboo staves, teasingly mocking its mannered conventions.

Frivolity, though, isn't the overriding note of these films, and to class them all as 'student comedies' is slightly misleading. 'Days of Youth', the earliest of them – and Ozu's earliest surviving film – is the lightest in tone, though even here there's a touch of regret: two students, Watanabe and Yamamoto, are both attracted to the same girl, but neither wins her, one because he's too brash, the other because he's too shy.

Saito Tatsuo, who plays the diffident Yamamoto, shows up in four of these films, and his roles steadily darken. Gangling and awkward, with earnest Harold Lloyd-style glasses, he seems destined to be one of nature's fall guys. In 'Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth?' (disillusionment here even being built into the title) he gets beaten up by an ex-fellow student, now his boss, and browbeaten into a marriage that, for all the forced gaiety of the film's ending, we suspect is destined for failure.

'Days of Youth' apart, all these films morph at some point into the parallel genre of 'salaryman drama', as the previously carefree students (few of them seem to work very hard, and exams are treated as a challenge for ingenuity in cheating) are faced with the harsh reality of finding a job. Okajima, the swordfighting champion of the near-farcical 'The Lady and the Beard', has the easiest time of it; for him it's largely a matter of shaving off his impressively bushy beard to land a job in a Thomas Cook travel office. But most of his contemporaries might well pre-echo the most famous line of 'Tokyo Story': "Life is disappointing, isn't it?" On reflection, these early films aren't perhaps quite as uncharacteristic of their director as they might at first seem.

'Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth?' has survived in a clean, almost totally unblemished print. The other four (or three and a bit, since 'I Graduated, But...' survives only as an 11-minute torso) are scuffed and fogged but never to the point of illegibility. Ed Hughes contributes fluent scores, either for solo piano or clarinet-cello-piano trio. There's a useful, chatty intro from the unfailingly informative Tony Rayns, taken from his talk at the NFT, and a substantial booklet of essays. A further considerable bonus is catching two of Japanese cinema's future acting greats, Tanaka Kinuyo and Ryu Chishu, in some of their earliest roles.

Life lessons: 'Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth?'

NEW RELEASES

An Affair to Remember

Leo McCarey; US 1957; Fox/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 119 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: audio commentary by singer Marni Nixon and film historian Joseph McBride, featurettes, 'AMC Backstory' episode, Fox Movietone News coverage of shipboard premiere, trailer

Film: This much-revived weepie has inspired remakes and pastiches and it's easy to understand why – McCarey knows just how to crank up the emotions. Cary Grant, who'd already worked with McCarey on the far more caustic *The Awful Truth* (1937), is initially at his most oleaginous and dapper as arch-seducer (and would-be artist) Nickie Ferrante, who falls in love with the beautiful Terry McKay (Deborah Kerr) on board an ocean liner. Initially, the dialogue has enough spikiness to atone for the underlying mawkishness of the storytelling, but Hugo Friedhofer's lachrymose music, the weird scenes of Kerr worshipping at a statue of Christ and the tremulous way she delivers her lines ensure that the film seems ever more maudlin. You can't help but think that McCarey (the master of screwball comedy) lays on the sentiment a bit thick – even his 1945 film *The Bells of St Mary's* wasn't quite as mushy as this. When Nickie and Terry plan their reunion on the 102nd floor the Empire State Building ("The nearest thing we have to heaven in New York"), we can already guess that their romance won't ever be straightforward.

McCarey's approach is extraordinarily manipulative – alongside the latter scenes of the bed-bound heroine, he throws in doe-eyed kids singing – but Grant underplays, delivering even the most loaded dialogue in his familiar clipped style. That's what makes the final scenes so affecting in spite of the tricks we're always aware the filmmakers are pulling on us. Nonetheless, the formula works and is ultimately disarming. This is a film that defies you to be cynical about it.

Disc: The Blu-ray comes packed with extras, including a short documentary about Kerr which features a surprisingly revealing interview with her husband Peter Viertel. He describes the acrimonious circumstances in which Kerr's previous marriage broke up, and talks about her sufferings from Parkinson's disease. Also included is a biographical profile of the colourful McCarey, whose life reads like something out of a Damon Runyon story: a would-be sports reporter and failed lawyer, he moved sideways into film, starting as an assistant to Tod Browning. He went on to "put Laurel and Hardy together", work with Harold Lloyd and the Marx Brothers and become a leading director of screwball comedies – an unlikely background for someone who made what is arguably Hollywood's most famous tearjerker. Peter Bogdanovich, who knew McCarey, is among the historians and academics discussing his career. (GM)

Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of A Tribe Called Quest

Michael Rapaport; US 2011; Sony Pictures Classics/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray; 97 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1; Features: director commentary, deleted scenes, theatrical trailer, featurettes

Film: The rap group A Tribe Called Quest produced a run of albums in the early 1990s that have come to epitomise the genre's 'golden era' of sample-based creativity. An alternative to both Public Enemy's late-1980s militant dominance and the West Coast's mid-1990s G-funk swagger, Tribe (along with their Native Tongues collective, which included an 18-year-old Queen Latifah), pioneered 'conscious rap', a subgenre much richer than its po-faced label suggests.

American actor Michael Rapaport (most recently seen in *Prison Break*) directs *Beats Rhymes & Life* with a keen awareness of the high esteem in which the group is held. A self-confessed fan, he diligently interviews all the major rap figures associated with Tribe (including Pharrell Williams, the Beastie Boys, Questlove and Common), telling the group's story with an obvious affection which slips into traumatised grief at their sudden split in 1998.

Rather than easing the pain, however, the process of making the film seems inadvertently to have reopened old disagreements, as lead rappers (and childhood friends) Q-Tip and Phife Dawg clash over their recollections of the break-up. The film also explores Phife's battle with diabetes and his agonising wait for a kidney transplant. It's this tension – between the joyful nostalgia for the group's glory days and these spikier present-day predicaments – that captures perfectly the essence of what A Tribe Called Quest always represented: beats, rhymes and life.
Disc: This well-presented package from Sony Pictures Classics offers deleted scenes and extended interviews, though Rapaport's mention in the director's commentary of further unseen footage (including a section on cult producer J Dilla) will leave Tribe fans wanting more. (DC)

Come and See

Elem Klimov; USSR 1985; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 136 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: Commissioned to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of WWII, Elem Klimov's extraordinary war film is in part a monument to the sufferings of Belarus, where, a caption reminds us, Nazi invaders burned down some 628 villages and killed their inhabitants. A lengthy culminating sequence recreates these events in harrowing you-are-there detail, yet the richness of the film is that it transcends realism. There's certainly a strong element of parable in the episodic narrative, as we see a 14-year-old grow old before our eyes, losing his child-like naivety as he recognises the basest human cruelty. Prefiguring Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998), Klimov is at pains to show the terrible impact of war on the animal world, not least in the staggering moment where a cow dies in a shower of tracer bullets; the striking sound mix reveals fragments of Mozart and Wagner, suggesting an end-of-history theme in keeping with the approach of contemporary Soviet composers Schnittke and Silvestrov.

It's the music, in a way, which lays the groundwork for the controversial ending. After more than two hours of brilliantly mounted, often surreally intense suffering and carnage, Klimov moves into a philosophical register, suggesting that for all the bloody realities of conflict, the skewed morality which created the Nazi war machine is even more chilling. *Come and See* is often described as one of the greatest war movies ever made, yet it goes beyond that, its scope broader than mere nationalist propaganda, to confront us with the imponderable conundrum of stopping history in its tracks.
Disc: An opportunity missed. The transfer is mainly adequate, but grain and video noise are apparent in lower-light scenes. Moreover there are no supplements, in a film crying out for in-depth treatment – Nouveaux Pictures' 2006 two-disc UK release, for instance, carried interviews with Klimov, leading actor Alexi Kravchenko and the production designer. (TJ)

An Affair to Remember This weepie has inspired remakes and pastiches and it's easy to understand why – McCarey knows how to crank up the emotions

The Cycle

Dariush Mehrjui; Iran 1978; Facets/IRMovies.com/Region 1 NTSC DVD; Aspect Ratio 3:4; Features: director's filmography, photographs

Film: As feverishly canonised in Iran as Makhmalbaf and Kiarostami, Dariush Mehrjui predates them all (making history with 1969's *The Cow*) and offers a subtler, less structuralist, more unpredictable menu, over the years employing a dogged humanism (getting him into trouble before and after the Revolution) while relying as much on his audience's associative intelligence as he does on his actors. (In this sense, Asghar Farhardi's recent film *A Separation* owes more to the Mehrjuian current in Iranian film culture than to any other.)

The Cycle is a bitter satire, which is often absurd but rarely funny. It was made in 1974 under the Shah's regime, which predictably banned it until 1978 for its merciless criticism of the society's rampaging corruption and bureaucratic evil. (Ironically, its modern dress, female flesh, sexy clinches and free-for-all degradations would've killed it under the new regime a year later.) The protagonists, a studly young man named Ali (Saeed Kangarani) and his wheezy, grizzled father (Esmail Mohammadi), come walking into the familiar construction-wasteland outskirts of Tehran as if from off stage; in no time the old man coughs and collapses in the dirt. But in Mehrjui, there's always unknown unknowns, and after waiting impatiently the young man rouses him and gets him walking again, continuing on their penniless search for medical treatment they can't afford.

The pair end up at the gates of a palatial but decaying hospital complex, as impenetrable in principle as Kafka's castle, and their efforts to raise money quickly get the leather-jacketed Ali becoming involved in a sleazy blood-selling ring, which rolls out into other quasi-outlaw schemes that tellingly mirror the capitalist heartlessness of society as a whole (the title is reportedly from the 14th-century poet Hafiz: "Because of the cycle of the universe, my heart is bleeding"). The film is chock-a-block with the exploited poor, the neglected elderly, embittered modern women (mostly nurses) and all manner of human refuse, but the overriding vibe is Eastern European – the Czech and Hungarian New Waves are pungently invoked, and the travails of a lone ethical doctor (Ezzatolah Entezami) battling totalitarian lunacy looks forward to Romanian director Lucian Pintille's *The Oak* (1992). Everywhere Ali goes, mysterious processions and wanderers litter the desolate background; one of his semi-legal jobs involves a chicken farm where, in order to keep prices down, they pour hundreds of live baby chicks into a ditch and (off-camera) bury them.

Immediate and visually disarming, Mehrjui's rough and furious movie has been typically hard to find, and deserves general New Wave-era consideration beyond the covert if hallowed place it holds in the annals of Iranian cinema.
Disc: The unrestored print is a little colour-weary but we'll take it. 'Special features' are nominal. (MA)

Dersu Uzala

Kurosawa Akira; USSR 1975; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 136 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic; Features: Yuri Solomin interview, production featurette, Vladimir Arsenyev newsreel, stills gallery

Film: Kurosawa's only non-Japanese film dramatised the true story of geographer/ethnographer Vladimir Arsenyev (Yuri Solomin)

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (3)

Intense and often surreal: 'Come and See'

NEW RELEASES

and his encounters with the elderly forest tracker Dersu Uzala (Maxim Munzuk) while mapping unexplored parts of the Ussuri taiga near the Russian-Chinese border just over a century ago. Thematically, it's a familiar adventure yarn, with the sophisticated modern man reduced to sometimes gibbering helplessness while his supposedly primitive companion keeps him alive in the face of various natural onslaughts – blizzards, rapids, tigers – but its abiding concern about man's relationship with and despoiling of natural resources is squarely in line with Kurosawa's other eco-conscious late films (*Dodes'ka-den*, *Dreams*).

The bulky 70mm camera precluded his usual visual dynamism, but the magnificent widescreen landscape shots offer ample compensation.
Disc: This welcome reissue offers a clear improvement on the original Ruscico/Artificial Eye DVD, but the source materials badly need proper photochemical restoration – the frequent colour shifts are hard to ignore. The soundtrack is mono (35mm version) rather than surround (70mm version). The extras are the same as before, and disappointingly skimpy: even the three-part Solomin interview is mainly luvvyish gushing, with next to nothing about what was clearly an arduous shoot. (MB)

Extérieur, nuit

Jacques Bral; France 1980; Arcades/Region 2 DVD; 107 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

Film: Jacques Bral is unlikely to be familiar to most UK cinephiles, not even for this, his best-known film to date (his standout credit would, I suppose, be as producer and co-writer on Sam Fuller's last cinema film, 1989's *Street of No Return*). But *Extérieur, nuit* (from an idea suggested by theorist Noël Burch, Bral's one-time film tutor) has always enjoyed a cult status in France, and a recent revival in a restored print has been followed by this new DVD release.

As the title suggests, this is a film about the night, in this instance the discomforting, bluesy Paris of 1978. For lost souls Léo and Bony it's ten years since they met on the barricades in May, and their friendship is an uneasy one. Léo can't deal with the post-68 corporate world, and dreams of making it as a jazz saxophonist. Bony plans to consolidate his occasional forays into writing by producing that great novel. Pointedly, Léo is never seen playing his sax, and Bony never actually gets down to filling up that blank page.

When Léo, thrown out by his frustrated girlfriend, imposes himself on the single Bony, the situation is ripe for both pain and dark comedy. Enter Cora, a haunted, androgynously attractive young woman who drives taxis at night, mainly it seems to attack the men who hit on her and steal their money. When she takes sex from Léo one night as payment, a strange dance begins between the threesome – she'll take Léo's lust but not his love, and maybe succumb to Bony's unsubtle seduction techniques. The wintry slush that surrounds them, brilliantly conveyed in Pierre-William Glenn's 16mm photography, offers little solace. The jazzy, haunting music of Karl-Heinz Schafer takes up where Gato Barbieri left off in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972).

But the undeniable strength of the film is in the three central performances. Gérard Lanvin's boyish good looks are just beginning to fade as his cynicism increases, and he's ideally matched by André Dussollier's goofy attempts at laddish inconsequence. And then there is Christine Boisson as Cora, giving an extraordinary performance charged with insolent eroticism and a feral desperation. She went on to be a haunting presence in Antonioni's *Identification of a Woman* (1982) but has never been seen again by the camera in quite the same way.

At the time of its release, comparisons were drawn with Godard's *Bande à part* and Pialat's *Loulou*, but really Bral's film is a remarkable one-off.
Disc: No supplements, but a fine transfer and good English subtitles available. (DT)

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (1)

Dane dame: 'Hamlet'

Hamlet

Sven Gade/Heinz Schall; Germany 1921; Edition Filmmuseum/Region 0 DVD; 111 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'Die Filmprimadonna' (fragments), Asta Nielsen footage, 'Hamlet' version comparisons, music featurettes, DVD-ROM archive, booklet

Film: Although created primarily to indulge its star Asta Nielsen's desire to follow in the footsteps of Sarah Bernhardt by playing the Dane, this 1921 oddity opens by citing Edward Vining's already-extant thesis that Hamlet was actually a woman in disguise. In a rethink of the play that seems decades ahead of its time (it often seems intentionally designed to address contemporary gender/queer identity issues), Hamlet's friendship with Horatio now brims with barely suppressed sexual tension, and the closet scene revolves around Gertrude being the only other person privy to her daughter's secret. Little of Shakespeare's text remains but many motifs are given effective cinematic translation, such as the literal snake-pit from which Claudius extracts the fatal venom.

Nielsen herself, largely forgotten except by reputation as the cinema's first true international star, offers something quite different from the eye-rollingly stagey performances prevalent in silent Shakespeare (and elsewhere in this film): her dark-eyed, androgynous Hamlet, dressed in modish black, wouldn't be out of place in something far more recent.
Discs: Sourced from the tinted German print that was rediscovered in 2005 and restored to its original length with interpolations from other surviving copies, this is in remarkably good shape for its preservation history. Excellent scholarly extras (all English-friendly, aside from a couple of booklet essays) include split-screen comparisons between the German and US versions (shot with separate cameras, and with substantially different editing and titles), two short featurettes about Michael Riessler's multi-instrumental score, newsreel footage of Nielsen in her 1912-14 prime, a brief home movie of the near-nonagenarian in 1970 and, of greatest historical interest, the surviving fragments of the early Nielsen vehicle *Die Filmprimadonna* (1913), a possibly autobiographical drama about a film star trying to exert greater creative influence on her latest vehicle. (MB)

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The Hellstrom Chronicle

Walon Green; US 1971; Olive Films/Region 1 DVD; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: An Academy Award-winner for best documentary in 1972, since lost in the overgrowth of obscurity, *The Hellstrom Chronicle* exists at the intersection of pure cinema and Mondo kitsch.

As a record of the hidden life of the insect world caught in frequently stop- and slow-motion microphotography, it's peerless, unforgettably penetrating the constricting interior of a cobra plant to show a trapped fly's last moments, or playing combat photographer in the thick of interspecies skirmishes. This footage is matched to music by composer Lalo Schifrin at the height of his powers, marshalling an eclectic score that shifts from crystalline, fragile modernism to a fuzz-tone psych-out over the post-coital feast of a black widow spider ("throbbing with obese sexuality"). The film's real theme, however, is the thousandfold-amplified sound of menacingly masticating mandibles – for the lesson of *The Hellstrom Chronicle* is that nature is scary and disgusting, and it will kill you.

This message – and the deadpan comic relief – comes courtesy of the film's host and narrator 'Dr Nils Hellstrom', unmasked in the closing credits as actor Lawrence Pressman. The premise is that Hellstrom has produced the film as a warning to humanity, prophesying our eventual supersession by bugs, which he claims are better equipped to survive the increasingly polluted environment, their orderly aristocracies superior to humankind's inefficient individualist democracies. This is accompanied by a purple-prose monologue (opening line: "The Earth was created, not with the gentle caress of love, but with the brutal violence of rape") made additionally ticklish by Pressman's lopsided grins whenever lecturing on the superior powers of the insect (even luna moths mating and emerging butterflies are construed as threats) or reviewing phony hidden-camera footage ("I did something a few weeks ago... experiments, you might call them..."). One particularly rich scene opens with Hellstrom discussing mating habits, cruising alone among amorous couples at a drive-in movie theatre, leading one to believe that six-legged creeps aren't the only threat afoot.

Disc: Neither liner notes nor extras, but the transfer resurrects a kaleidoscopic, otherworldly jaw-dropper. (NP)

Marketa Lazarová

Frantisek Vlácil; Czechoslovakia 1967; Czech National Film Archive/Region 2 DVD/Region-free Blu-ray; 165 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: interviews with Frantisek Vlácil, film critic Zdena Sapková and art historian Jan Royt, restoration documentary, stills gallery, booklet

Film: Long exalted at home as the national film masterpiece but almost unknown internationally until Second

Off the tracks

Nick Pinkerton *on French director Jean-Pierre Gorin, whose essay films offer us the chance to see the ordinary and the day-to-day with a fresh eye*

Three Popular Films by Jean-Pierre Gorin

Poto and Cabengo/Routine Pleasures/My Crasy Life

US 1980/86/92; Criterion Collection Eclipse/Region 1 DVD; 73/79/98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

In his 1986 film 'Routine Pleasures', director Jean-Pierre Gorin observes the Tuesday-night ritual of a group of rail enthusiasts who convene weekly in an unassuming building on the Del Mar Fairgrounds outside San Diego, California. Here, the members of the Pacific Beach & Western railway club – exclusively male, presumably blue-collar, mostly in middle-age or past – meet to maintain and run model trains, according to their 'Big Board' schedule, through a detailed town-and-field landscape first laid out in 1958.

The other side of 'Routine Pleasures' concerns the tabletop still-lifes of Manny Farber, the American painter and film critic who had retired from publishing with a 1977 review of Chantal Akerman's 'Jeanne Dielman', devoting himself to teaching at the University of California in San Diego – and to working and reworking the elements of his oil-on-board topographies with the same niggling attention he once devoted to the placement of adjectives.

Gorin (who moved to the US from his native France in 1975) locates his adopted America at the intersection of these two private, obsessively recreated worlds, that of the PB&W (whose painstaking scenery expert recalls taking a "history course on geology, how the land formations were actually formed...") and that of Farber's deeply personal canvases, such as 'Birthplace: Douglas, Ariz'. (Farber said, in a 1977 interview: "The landscape that I live in is very important, just as the language that I decided on as a critic was excruciatingly important.")

It was Farber who, when organising the film programme at the still-young university's Department of Visual Arts, brought Gorin from Paris to UCSD to lecture on film aesthetics. Gorin is there still; a look at his student-generated gradings on RateMyProfessors.com turns up many encomiums, as well as nuggets such as: "Said we all had our heads up our asses and didn't know ** about film," or, more commonly, "Goes off topic."**

That last complaint gets at much of the spontaneous 'eureka!' pleasures and sudden reversals of the essay films Gorin made in southern California, his adopted home under Ronald Reagan's governorship and later presidency,

Up on the roof: 'My Crasy Life'

The complaint that he 'goes off topic' gets at the 'eureka!' pleasures of his films

a culture he viewed through – to use a cliché, which Gorin rarely does – thinly cut 'slices of life'.

In 'Routine Pleasures,' Gorin acknowledges the degree to which Farber – as a patient translator of American mores and a pragmatic, doggedly anti-nostalgic voice of warning against allowing Gorin's Old World romance to impose itself over his clear view of the New – was the mentor in the second phase of his filmmaking career. The looming figure of the first act was Jean-Luc Godard, with whom Gorin had collaborated during Godard's Dziga Vertov Group period.

The fit may seem most natural for the Sorbonne-educated leftist radical that Gorin was, but he seems to have checked his 'Belly of the Beast' prejudices about America, endemic among anti-Vietnam War soixante-huitards, somewhere at Charles de Gaulle airport. After previously planning to film a commissioned screenplay by Philip K. Dick and decamping to the Philippines to work on 'Apocalypse Now', Gorin made 'Poto and Cabengo', his first American film, in 1980. He had followed a trail of

Trainspotting: 'Routine Pleasures'

headlines to Ginny and Grace Kennedy, twins living on a tract-housing backlot in San Diego who had been thought to be communicating in a complex secret language that they had developed, which sounded something like a tape recording running backwards. Gorin arrived on the scene after the girls' mystery was solved, their pidgin chirping broken into component parts: a hotchpotch of their grandmother's German, their mother's German/Southern-accented English and their father's Georgia drawl. (The ear for polyglot American accents recurs in 'My Crasy Life', made 12 years later, about Samoan street gangs in Los Angeles.) Going 'off topic', Gorin then found his film in the household: bewigged mother might have stepped out of a Fassbinder film; father is a particularly American flop, a real-estate salesman nearing 50, one of the hordes who, per Gorin, "pay for their own gas and cling to hopes of commission on a sale", who reads books like 'The Master Key to Riches' and dreams of unlikely celebrity for his mildly curious daughters, though "maybe not Shirley Temple status".

Gorin's Peugeot, the sole foreign element, parked outside the Kennedy home, reappears in miniature in 'Routine Pleasures'. That excellent film's title might come from Gorin's discussion of the service variations that the PB&W gang work in between the intractable requirements of the Big Board's schedule – "behind that routine, little flurries that give the game its salt" – a definition of the capacity for variety within industrial repetition, and just the sort of thing that Farber descried in the workaday American action films which Gorin explicitly homages here.

To rediscover the banal with new eyes is the immigrant's privilege; to share that vision is Gorin's gift to his new home, and to all of us.

NOZONE

In treatment

Tim Lucas *on Robert Bloch's underrated 1960s thriller 'The Couch', which takes us inside the mind of a serial killer*

The Couch

Owen Crump; US 1962; Warner Archive/Region 1; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

Mental Bloch: Grant Williams and Onslow Stevens in 'The Couch'

By the time Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho' premiered in June 1960, the author of its source novel, Robert Bloch, despite having no input into its actual script, had taken full advantage of his association with the picture, suddenly breaking into the world of Hollywood film production after almost 30 years of writing fancifully macabre fiction.

Bloch had his eye on writing movies for a long time, if his first novel 'The Scarf' is any judge, being the story of an author who strangles the originals of all his women characters, a process that paints him into a corner just as the first film based on his work is about to premiere. Making an initial script sale to Hitchcock's television show opened doors to other series produced on the Universal lot, including 'Lock Up' and 'Thriller'. After another year of TV scripting, Bloch ascended to features with two projects, neither of which was based on one of his own stories though he had well over a hundred of them. By the end of the 1960s, there would exist an entire sub-category of suspense and horror cinema defined by Bloch: suave psychological thrillers with stings in the tail, wryly sardonic in tone, usually marauding under deceptively bland titles. Britain's Hammer Films took a lot from Bloch conceptually ('The Snorkel', 'Maniac', 'Paranoiac', 'Nightmare' and 'Hysteria', to name a few), but it was competing company Amicus Productions that actually hired him, resulting in 'The Skull', 'Torture Garden', 'Asylum' and more.

All that is evoked by Bloch's name – a Charles Addams-like atmosphere equal parts gloss and creep, a dark score steeped in slinkiness and irony, outwardly attractive characters who are an unholy mess inside thanks to the institution of marriage or family – is somehow contained within 'The Couch', his very first screenplay sale, though it was actually based on a story by Blake Edwards and its director, Owen Crump. (Bloch further negotiated the right to pen a novelisation.) It's about a handsome and outwardly cheerful young man, Charles Campbell (Grant Williams), who is secretly the fiend identified by newspaper headlines as 'the Stabber'. It's his modus operandi to phone the police, tell them exactly when he's going to commit his next murder, then walk the teeming streets of Los Angeles towards the office of his therapist Dr Janz (Onslow Stevens) until the time of his appointment, when he shoves an icepick through the back of a random stranger and quickly ducks inside a nearby office building to keep his appointment, which provides his alibi. "Been waiting long?" asks the doctor. "About ten minutes," he smiles, leaving the magazine he's just grabbed in the waiting room. Inside the office waits the couch, for which Charles seems to show abnormal fear and dread.

To find antecedents for the film's murderous protagonist we must reach back to Fritz Lang's 'M' (1931) and Joseph Losey's 1951 remake of same, which like this film was shot in a noirish though documentary manner in actual Los Angeles locations. What makes 'The Couch' revolutionary within its genre is the extent to which we are not only encouraged to like Charles, despite what we know about him from the beginning, but also to share his self-deceptions as he goes through the psychiatric process of facing the suppressed facts of his life and illness. Bloch only selectively allows us to know things about Charles that he doesn't yet know himself; for the most part we gain these insights in therapy as Charles himself is made aware of them, and we share his shock as Janz presents him with startling truths he has blocked from his own view of reality.

The seeds of these revelations about Charles's past are cleverly woven into his present in the form of his attraction to Dr Janz's princess-like niece and receptionist Terry Ames (Shirley Knight). His playful, almost childlike romancing of Terry parallels his feelings for an older sister he remembers accidentally killing in a car accident two years earlier, just as his resentment for Janz is tied to his living, seething hatred for a father who has in fact died.

What makes the film revolutionary is the extent to which we are encouraged to like Charles and share his self-deceptions

Williams (who brought such nobility to his earlier lead role in Universal's 'The Incredible Shrinking Man') is unnervingly charming and twisted as Charles, and Knight (in her first female lead following a breakout ingénue performance in Delbert Mann's 'The Dark at the Top of the Stairs' – now there's a title Bloch might have dreamed up!) is touching as the girl who wants so badly to believe in the future Charles describes for them that she rejects the attentions of a far more suitable rival. Of the supporting cast, Hope Summers is particularly memorable as Charles's landlady, who attends the newspaper and radio details of each new murder with sparkling eyes.

Bloch himself feels like the film's truest auteur, perhaps because so little is known about its director, whose only studio feature this was. Owen Crump directed 'The Couch' when he was pushing 60, after a long career of making documentary shorts, the most recent being a trio of Bell Science television hours. Though he lived another 30 years, he never directed another picture, but this film counts as a complete artistic success. Crump may have simply been following Bloch's script or the suggestions of cameraman Harold E. Stine (who later perpetuated this film's look and feel in the Bloch-scripted 'The Night Walker'), but the directorial vision is impressive. We are shown only the back of Williams's head for the first eight minutes, slyly encouraging our identification with a character doing terrible things; the importance of time to Charles's alibi is complimented by his downfall taking place on a hospital floor exposed to a neighbouring building's rotating time display, the resulting strobe effect heightening the delirium of the climax.

Warner Archive's disc-on-demand of this undeservedly obscure title contains minor instances of frame repair and one loud sportcoat that produces a mild moiré effect, but these should deter no collector from making its acquaintance.

NEW RELEASES

Run's pioneering 2007 DVD release, Frantisek Vlácil's "film rhapsody" (a self-description) still astonishes not merely for its tactile recreation of medieval Central Europe but also for its dauntingly alien sensibility. Recent English-friendly DVDs have revealed many superb Czech and Slovak films set in the last millennium's first half – Eduard Grecner's *Dragon's Return* (1967), Otakar Vávra's *Witches' Hammer* (1969), Vlácil's own *The Devil's Trap* (1961) and *The Valley of the Bees* (1967). But *Marketa* towers above them all, as much for the complexity of its film language and multilayered soundtrack (Zdenek Liska's score, a fusion of medieval plainsong, late Janácek and Harry Partch, remains a marvel) as for its wholly convincing portrait of a violent pagan world on the cusp of Christian conversion, in which a nunnery offers the much abused Marketa the only reliable sanctuary from rival clans and ever-circling wolves.

Discs: Released in separate Blu-ray and DVD editions, bilingual (Czech/English) in all respects other than the menus, this was sourced from the recent digital restoration unveiled at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in July 2011. Unsurprisingly, the Blu-ray is a significant advance on the Second Run DVD: although the restoration was controversial for being undertaken in only six weeks, the end result, sourced from the camera negative, is both impressively clean and convincingly film-like. The BBFC's removal of two seconds of snake abuse from the UK version isn't an issue here. Each package contains the same supplementary DVD, whose highlight is a 1989 interview with Vlácil. (Available from Czech online retailers: filmcity.cz ships internationally.) (MB)

Orphans

Peter Mullan; UK 1997; Park Circus/Region B2 DVD; Certificate 18; 102 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: trailer, photo gallery, three short films by Peter Mullan ('Fridge', 'Close', and 'Good Day for the Bad Guys')

Film: Peter Mullan's first feature, an unsettling but compulsively watchable mix of the dour and the darkly comic conjured out of the grieving of four adult siblings, remains strong meat. For every grim flourish that works triumphantly (the unbearable grief and hilarity of a karaoke serenade to a dead mother) there's another (a faceful of semen for a snooping assailant, a church roof peeled away dramatically by a biblical storm) that misses the mark. The film's sheer intensity carries it off, however, stoked by Douglas Henshall's banked rage as the brother leaking blood and Glasgow machismo in equal parts after a stabbing, and Gary Lewis's rigidly righteous elder sibling, crouched under a coffin he insists on toting solo ("She ain't heavy, she's my mother"). Yes, you can still catch whiffs of Loach and Boyle in its social realism and slivers of surrealism, but in sequences like the slyly sustained

assault on a vile publican, Mullan's own gift for tragicomedy comes through loud and clear.

Disc: The digital transfer copes with the murk of a Glasgow night with aplomb. Thankfully, despite the sorry absence of a director's commentary (Mullan is a great anecdotalist), there are three chewy earlier shorts included, of which *Fridge*'s piercingly sad winos-versus-neds battle over a trapped child is the standout. (KS)

The Phantom of the Opera

Rupert Julian; US 1925; Park Circus/ Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray/ Certificate PG; 78/91/114 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1/1.19:1; Features: 1925/29 versions, multiple music tracks (Alloy Orchestra, Gaylord Carter, Gabriel Thibaudeau, Frederick Hodges), trailer, stills gallery, PDF facsimiles of the 1925 script and souvenir programme (via DVD-ROM)

Film: One of the great blood-and-thunder silent horror melodramas, *The Phantom of the Opera* remains rollicking entertainment to this day, thanks both to Lon Chaney's rumbustious performance in the title role and the fact that it was the only version made when original author Gaston Leroux was still alive: it has the occasionally cracked patina of historical authenticity that its numerous successors can't match. Criticisms of the galumphing staginess of many set pieces and the less-than-sparkling characterisation of the romantic leads, while more than valid, seem beside the point.

Discs: This lavish package appears to showcase three versions of the film, though the two high-definition copies on the Blu-ray disc are the same 1929 reissue version played at different projection speeds to match pre-existing soundtracks. The 24fps (78-minute) version is in remarkably good condition for its age, while the 20fps (91-minute) version, though running at a more historically accurate speed, has more visible damage and is compromised by an interlaced picture (the standard bodge-job solution to achieve an apparently slower frame rate than the fixed speeds demanded by the Blu-ray format). Both versions are tinted and toned, and include two-strip Technicolor (the Bal Masque) and hand-painted sequences (the Phantom's red cape, the shimmering heat of his basement dungeon). The longer 1925 cut is included on the supplementary DVD, but is in very poor condition, derived from the only surviving 16mm dupe copy. Lon Chaney expert-cum-obsessive Dr Jon Mirsalis supplies a lively, hugely informative commentary covering the film and Chaney's career. (MB)

A monster in Paris: 'The Phantom of the Opera'

Putty Hill As an example of how to make a true US indie with a pure heart, rigorous intent and a mature eye, it might turn out to be a landmark

Putty Hill

Matt Porterfield; US 2010; Cinema Guild/ Region 1 NTSC DVD; 85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 3:4; Features: commentaries, deleted scenes, making-of documentary, Porterfield's 2006 feature debut 'Hamilton', essays by Andrew O'Hehir and Richard Brody

Film: One of the breakout American indies of 2010, Matt Porterfield's searching, brooding exploration of a threadbare working-class Baltimore suburb takes the most salient aspects of the mumblecore trend – ultra-realistic lighting, non-directive camerawork, grungy Gen-Y spaces (floored mattresses, not beds), low-rent ambience, downbeat action and acting so naturalistic that little seems to happen – and invests it with crafty power. The most arresting departure from orthodoxy, amid this immersion in reality, is to have the inarticulate young characters suddenly and at unpredictable moments begin fielding questions from behind the camera, as if they're in a documentary, giving the whole film the air of anthropology as well as meta-minimalism, like a Yankee counterpart to Kiarostami, Hou, Tsai and Costa.

The central event is the recent OD death (or suicide) of a local twentysomething lad, which draws the scrubby community into a tight nexus of bruised psyches and lost lives. The heroine only gradually emerges from the crowd of wandering teens and dope-inhaling lowlifes: Jenny (Sky Ferreira), the dead boy's cousin and a ragdoll-outfitted wastrel with an uncontrollable head of dirty blonde waves, comes back to town for the funeral and has to suffer living with her ex-con/tattoo-artist dad (Charles Sauers), whose cheap digs are full of seamy traffic and constant needlework loud enough to warrant subtitles.

We glimpse the relationships only in cross-section slices, when they're not teased out by Porterfield's offscreen interrogator, and the stringent aesthetic is familiar, if not for American films – our omnipresence punctured and grasping at meaning while the characters struggle to reveal as little as possible. Porterfield's camera is carefully placed, and offscreen space is enormous. The cast are, predictably, all non-pro, and all were assembled for a completely different film when financial backing vanished, leaving Porterfield to quickly muster a loose situational structure for the native Baltimoreans and then film them improvising.

Never less than convincing, the movie does feel constrainingly small in the end; you wait for an offhand epiphany that never quite comes. But as an example of how to make a true US indie with a pure heart, rigorous intent and a mature eye, it might turn out to be something like a landmark.

Disc: Watching deleted scenes of a movie so casually caught and assembled seems a little counterintuitive, while the glimpses we get in the making-of documentary of Porterfield's set-ups and lighting schemes are startlingly elaborate. But the best supplements are additional films, and Porterfield's six-year-old debut film *Hamilton* is just as indelible as *Putty Hill*, briefer and less dramatic (!), while using many of the same locations and the same partial-view compositions. (MA)

The Pyx

Harvey Hart; Canada 1973; Scorpion Releasing/Region 1 DVD; 108 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic

Film: There is no North American city where faith and vice openly jostle in such close quarters as Montreal: topless breakfast spots compete with Mass options, while among the stunning Métis strippers a crucifix is as de rigueur as silicone. *The Pyx*, a 'Canuxploitation' police procedural based on a novel by the Québécois writer John Buell, is concerned with this dichotomy. The film begins with an aerial view of the illuminated cross atop Mount Royal, then drops into the city's depths. Detective Sergeant Jim Henderson (a fine Christopher Plummer, offhand, brusque and occasionally bilingual) arrives at a night-time crime scene – a prostitute has fallen from a penthouse flat, either after jumping or being pushed. The body, identified as one Elizabeth Lucy, is Karen Black – who also performs the wintry folksongs that blow across the soundtrack, including a sung 'Song of Solomon'.

With the introduction of the corpse, the movie opens into a bifurcated structure, alternating between scenes of Henderson's investigation, as his material witnesses are picked off, and Elizabeth's last day, as she's pushed into performing for a wealthy, sinister client. Our foreknowledge of her death gives

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NEW RELEASES

Elizabeth's scenes a feeling of predestination, while her lapsed Catholic yearning filters through the pained tremors of Black's performance ("I sought him but I found him not," she sings). The regular switch-off between Elizabeth's scenes and Henderson's undermines the urgency of the plot's race-against-time element, but in place of suspense a melancholy chill slips in – the lingering mood that defines this strange, wounding film.
Disc: Part of Scorpion's 'Katarina's Nightmare Theater' series, the disc features a worthless introduction by pro-wrestler Katarina Waters; more significant is a commentary track by a chirpy, free-associative Karen Black ("People in Canada just do better hair...") and haplessly corralling interviewer Marc Edward Heuck, working at cross-purposes, entertainingly. After shameful previous attempts, this anamorphic transfer is the best home-video outing René Verzier's spelean Panavision cinematography has ever had. (NP)

Repo Man

Alex Cox; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/ Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: Audio commentary with Cox and executive producer Michael Nesmith, casting director Victoria Thomas, and actors Sy Richardson, Zander Schloss, and Del Zamora; new video piece by Cox; 'Repo Man' (entire TV version); 'Repossessed' – a retrospective video piece on the making of the film; 'The Missing Scenes'; 'Harry Zen Stanton' – extended interview with Harry Dean Stanton; original theatrical trailer, 44-page booklet specially created by Cox. (Also available in a limited-edition steelbook packaging)

Film: Alex Cox's debut feature has the legend of being the quintessential 80s cult film, a mainstay of the Midnight-Movie circuit that spoke to the disaffected, post-punk margins in its often surrealistic yet sharp satirising of the gung-ho economics and revived nuclear paranoia of the Reagan-era, while gleefully throwing all manner of pop-culture and movie references into the pot. Emilio Estevez offers a glimpse of a career that might have been in his charismatic portrayal of Otto, a livewire young punk who gets sacked from his job stacking supermarket shelves and is taken under the wing of Harry Dean Stanton's Bud, a car repossession man who lives by his own Zen-like 'Repo Code'. Meanwhile, a mysterious driver arrives in town with a nuclear haul in his trunk capable of vapourising a man in an instant... Revisiting the film nearly 30 years on, its cult reputation feels entirely earned, and its influence undeniable – it fizzes with playful visual and textual ideas and meta-movie gags of the kind Tarantino would adopt a decade or so later, from naming its repo man characters after different American beers, to the mysterious, *Kiss Me Deadly*-inspired nuclear Pandora's Box in the car trunk that was surely an inspiration for the glowing briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*.
Disc: For a film that was probably first seen by most on a grungy VHS tape, a faded print, or on late-night TV, the restored version on this Blu-ray edition will come as a complete revelation. Robby Müller's cinematography is revealed in all of its atmospheric, painterly glory, particularly in the night scenes where the neon and street lights play against the Los Angeles skies. The disc comes loaded with extras, including an out-there interview with Harry Dean Stanton and the entire variant TV version of the film, which overdubs any profanity with hilarious and often surreal alternative dialogue. Also great fun is the accompanying booklet, which reveals that the film started life as an unpublished graphic novel, written and illustrated by Cox. The booklet reproduces Cox's original artwork, as well as new art produced specially for this release (extracts of which are published in this issue of *S&S*, see page 48). (JB)

Repo Man Alex Cox's debut feature fizzes with playful visual ideas and meta-movie gags of the kind Tarantino would adopt a decade or so later

Rolling Thunder

John Flynn; US 1977; StudioCanal/ Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 18; 96/99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: commentary by co-writer Heywood Gould, interview with co-star Linda Haynes, trailer commentary by Eli Roth, trailer and television spot

With a vengeance: 'Rolling Thunder'

Film: This post-Nam revenge thriller was to have been Paul Schrader's directorial debut, but he left the project when the studio balked at his contentious original script showing a racist US officer returning home to continue his own private war against a Mexican criminal gang. Faint echoes of *Taxi Driver* remain in the finished version after Hollywood journeyman Heywood Gould's rewrite, but the outcome is mainly a rather simplistic revenge drama in which tightly wound former POWs William Devane and Tommy Lee Jones (oozing presence in only his second major film role) tool up to take out the villains who've made Devane's troubled homecoming a living nightmare.

True, there's a definite sense that their experiences at the hands of North Vietnamese captors have dehumanised these men, but events move towards a fist-pumping action finale that's brutal, crass and not a little troubling. Certainly understandable that a disgruntled Schrader called it a fascist film.

Putting these thorny issues aside if you can – Quentin Tarantino was such a fan of the film that he named his own shortlived distribution outfit after it – it's still possible to appreciate the lean, mean direction by John Flynn (who also gave us 1973's *The Outfit*, one of that decade's killer B-flicks) and admire Devane's brooding central performance. Just when his career seemed to be building towards the major stardom that never quite materialised, he delivered this chillingly underplayed portrait of a man apart. The concentration with which he saws off a shotgun is one thing, but his insistence on remaining hidden behind aviator sunglasses effectively builds the story's foreboding. Worth a look for 1970s exploitation specialists, but definitely a problematic entertainment.
Disc: Jordan Cronenweth's *noir*-influenced cinematography comes up beautifully in the Blu-ray transfer – although, in a way, the seedy atmosphere of the film works just as well on the somewhat murkier DVD. Extras are somewhat fuller than the barebones Region 1 DVD, but co-writer Heywood Gould's commentary is a disappointingly superficial affair. (TJ)

Der Rosenkavalier

Paul Czinner; UK/Austria 1962; Park Circus/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate E; 192 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: trailer

Film: In recent years, thanks to digital technology, it has become possible to screen 'live' performances of plays, concerts and operas in cinemas. However, the drive to capture 'high art' on camera is nothing new. Back in the silent era, Adolph Zukor enjoyed one of his first major screen successes with a four-reel film featuring Sarah Bernhardt performing in *Queen Elizabeth* (1912).

Paul Czinner's film of the Vienna State Opera Ballet, the Vienna State Opera Chorus and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's production of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, shot live at the Salzburg Festival in 1960, is in this tradition. It's an impressively mounted affair – the camerawork and editing are far more fluid than you might expect, even if there aren't proper close-ups and some scenes are simply filmed rigidly, in long shot. Czinner has a sense of pacing and drama, setting the scene by filming conductor Herbert Von Karajan as he marches out to take charge of the orchestra. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, who plays Princess von Werdenberg, was a legendary figure and Czinner has caught her in her pomp.

For all its technical ingenuity, for non-devotees of opera this can be heavy-going. The film is over three hours long, unfolds primarily in the same ornate courtly settings and relies heavily on intertitles to explain its plot.

The film was made by the Rank Organisation, and whatever else, it's a radical departure from the Norman Wisdom comedies and Donald Sinden dramas the company was better known for in the period.
Disc: This restored version looks and sounds spectacular – although you can't help wondering why the distributors have been so meticulous about the restoration but have completely neglected to provide any extras or contextual information. It would have been fascinating to discover, for instance, why the film was commissioned, how it was released and how audiences and critics responded to it. (GM)

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

Films by Suzuki Seijun

Tokyo Drifter

Japan 1966; Criterion/Region 0 NTSC DVD/Region A Blu-ray; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1. Features: interviews with Suzuki Seijun and assistant director Kuzuu Masami, essay by Howard Hampton, trailer

Branded to Kill

Japan 1967; Criterion/Region 0 NTSC DVD/Region A Blu-ray; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: interviews with Suzuki Seijun, assistant director Masami Kuzuu and star Joe Shishido, essay by Tony Rayns, trailer

Films: Nothing quite stings the throat and refreshes the nasal cavities like a Suzuki Seijun film, each typically a voguing cataract of ironic cruelty, surreal juxtapositions, inappropriate bursts of raw colour, abrupt dolly shots, lovely ugliness, raving performances and jump-cut epilepsy. Of the lunatics who ran the asylum of the Japanese New Wave, Suzuki was the most proudly pulpy, but in such a self-regarding, quasi-Fullerian/Godardian way that the man's luridly hilarious films, in a sea of outlandish Japanese hyperbole, are always unmistakably his.

His disgust with orthodoxy radiates like desert heat from his movies, the crime narratives of which are merely cheap suits worn on the wacky path to self-destruction. Here are his two most notorious and loveable Nikkatsu scorchers, newly restored, the latter famous for being so irrational and impressionistic that the fed-up studio suits finally fired the filmmaker (a popular protest and lawsuit ensued; Suzuki won damages but his career sputtered and resorted to TV). *Branded*, in fact, is close to being a pure ideogram movie: every sex-and-death fever-spike image-idea that ever haunted the post-war Japanese brainpan is here in close to vodkal form, distilling down its gestalt – of silk-suited Joe Shishido plus naked dames good and evil plus guns plus fetishistic sex plus uncorked modernist despair – to iconic fragments and compositional obliqueness. Shishido's career hitman, set up for a fall and obsessed with being number one in some classically Suzukian assassin register, holds this crazy daydream together, but the unsolved mysteries, vague conspiracies, unmotivated cutaways to empty spaces and montage sutures that border on free-associative threaten in any given moment to implode. It might be the most self-knowingly rebellious of New Wave films, or merely a mega-Fuller on dexies, but what's certain is that Nikkatsu was foolish to can Suzuki – he cared about his audience's good time, and never bored.

Tokyo Drifter is nominally more orthodox, a saga of a young, pastel-blue-suited yakuza pulled back into internecine gang warfare despite his loyalty to his original boss. But Suzuki jump cuts like popcorn, leaps from expired-stock black-and-white to fluorescent colour, lights nightclub interiors as though they were settings for Gene Kelly dream-ballets, stages the goofiest barroom brawl of all time, cuts incessantly to a single twisted and leafless tree for reasons unknown, and interpolates the title pop song – which came first – into the film at random points, even as a post-shootout, walk-in-the-snow musical number. (Robert Altman stole this gag for *The Long Goodbye* six years later, and the two songs even sound alike.)

All told, Suzuki at his prime was one of the medium's deftest and most ironic master of ceremonies, and the films are rockets from a fresh and unpredictable world.

Discs: The new digital restorations are state of the art, and the retrospective interviews are great fun, particularly since everyone more or less shrugs over the films' cartwheels and explosions as simply what they thought was fun and not dull at the time. (Shishido also shrugs over his chipmunk-cheek plastic surgery, right after he whips a gun out from under the table and plays at shooting the camera.) Naturally, the essays by Tony Rayns and Howard Hampton are, respectively, erudite and rousing. (MA)

Films of the Taiwan New Cinema

The Terrorizers

Edward Yang; Taiwan 1986; Sony Music Entertainment/Region 0 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; 109 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: interviews with collaborators

Vive L'Amour

Tsai Ming-Liang; Taiwan 1994; Sony Music Entertainment/Region 0 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: interviews with Tsai and actors

Films: These two titles are from a collection made available in Taiwan of five 'classics' that have undergone digital restoration for combined Blu-ray and DVD release. The others are Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Dust in the Wind* (1987), Chen Yu-Hsun's *Tropical Fish* (1995) and Chen Kuo-Fu's *The Personals* (1998).

Neither Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers* (which frequently used to be titled in the singular, *The Terrorizer*) nor Tsai Ming-Liang's *Vive L'Amour* have been widely seen in the UK, in spite of acclaim at festivals and the subsequent acceptance of the filmmakers into the major league. Both films vividly convey a sense of Taipei in the period they were filmed and, as has often been stated, both owe a considerable debt to Antonioni in their visual emphasis on our relationship with the architectural space and spare urban landscapes of the late 20th century. In each case, the narrative revolves around chance encounters between disparate sets of characters that lead to intensely disruptive events.

The inspiration for *The Terrorizers* came to Yang from an article on the mixed-race children produced by the American presence in Taiwan, and his discovery of the young girl Wang An. He cast her as the catalyst in a story involving two sets of couples: a photographer who's at odds with his girlfriend, and a writer whose block draws little understanding from her ineffectual, corporate-minded husband. When the girl escapes from a police siege, she's captured on film by the photographer, who becomes obsessed with tracking her down. Forced to stay indoors by her mother, the girl indulges in prank calls, which result in the writer disappearing from home and her forlorn husband seeking help from his oldest friend, a cop. But her estrangement results in a successful book which, through its autobiographical element, becomes surprisingly linked to the narrative of the film we're watching. Yang orchestrates all these elaborate strategies with tremendous conviction, and then ends the film with ambiguous scenes of death and destruction that will either thrill or frustrate the viewer.

Vive L'Amour also plays games with our expectations and shifting points of view, and examines the distance between intimacy and lust with playful absurdity. The first image is of a dangling key in a door, which makes an empty apartment in a modern high-rise available to a melancholy young man contemplating suicide. But this same apartment also becomes the love pad for a lonely but strangely assertive estate agent and the feckless young man she picks up on the street. Just as the situation develops into a sophisticated farce, so the characters discover painful truths about their situations, with Tsai boldly underlining the gay yearnings of the young man, played by favourite actor Kang Sheng-Lee. The long takes and superb use of the frame show the director at his finest (the film carried off the Golden Lion at the 1994 Venice Film Festival).

Discs: Some of these editions have come under criticism in Taiwan but to my eye these two transfers are excellent. Each film is preceded by a promo for the fine work done, and the DVD discs carry, respectively, a touching tribute to Edward Yang from his collaborators and a highly amusing confrontation between Tsai Ming-Liang and his actors, who now laugh about how little they understood what their director was up to during the shoot. The subtitles aren't perfect (too fast in the case of the extras) but certainly serviceable. The discs can be ordered from yesasia.com and similar sites. (DT)

Branded to Kill It's close to being a pure ideogram: every sex-and-death fever-spike image-idea that ever haunted the post-war Japanese brainpan is here

NEW RELEASES

Travels with My Aunt

George Cukor; US 1972; Warner Archive/Region 0 DVD; 109 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

Film: Like Otto Preminger, George Cukor turned to Graham Greene in the 1970s. Preminger's *The Human Factor* (1979) might be a masterpiece, and while *Travels with My Aunt* isn't quite, it's undoubtedly among Cukor's finest late films.

Not that Greene would agree. The author told Cukor biographer Patrick McGilligan that he "very much disliked" the adaptation. Forget Greene: I see the film as a distant heir to Cukor's 1938 movie of Philip Barry's *Holiday*, in which Cary Grant played the freethinking Johnny Case, who butts heads with his fiancée's conventional family. Greene's Aunt Augusta is cut from the same cloth. Where Johnny performs spontaneous backflips when he "feels a worry coming on", Augusta crashes funerals, such as that of her estranged sister. That's where she meets her meek, decent nephew Henry (Alec McCowen), who accompanies his flamboyant relation on a series of misadventures.

Cukor's direction is lithesome and bright. As Augusta, Maggie Smith is remarkable, playing a considerably older woman, even if one sympathises with critic Roger Greenspun, who wrote that for all her energy, "it is the energy of caricature rather than personality". On the other hand, as Tooley, a hippie Henry meets on a train to Istanbul, Cindy Williams is as natural and unaffected as the Katharine Hepburn of *Holiday* or *The Philadelphia Story*.

Hepburn was in fact supposed to play Augusta but was, Cukor said, "pulled off the picture". Her director wished to join her, but as he relayed, "She said, 'Don't you dare.'" Luckily, he took her advice. Amid much production turmoil, how did he make a film so joyous? Perhaps he reminded himself what Augusta might do in his situation. As she says to the reticent Henry before they begin their travels, "Pack, Henry. Pack."

Disc: Warner Archive's DVD-R offers a handsome widescreen transfer of what is – what with Augusta's red hair and Henry's treasured dahlias – Cukor's richest colour film since his days with George Hoyningen-Huene. (PT)

Also released

Punishment Park

Peter Watkins; UK 1971; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 18; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: video introduction by Peter Watkins, audio commentary by Dr Joseph A. Gomez, booklet with essays

This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, James Bell, Michael Brooke, Dylan Cave, Trevor Johnston, Geoffrey Macnab, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables, David Thompson and Peter Tonguette

TELEVISION

Bill Brand

Thames/ITV; UK 1976; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; 572 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Programme: Finally making its way to home video, Trevor Griffiths's crusading look at Westminster realpolitik may have been ultra-topical when screened during the summer of 1976, yet remains both instructive and compelling today. The 11-part serial depicts in detail the tumultuous first year of a newly elected Labour MP, former Trotskyite and all-round maverick William Brand (a sallow Jack Shepherd). Given the primetime slot and the sheer scale of the undertaking (it was screened across three months, Griffiths having worked on it for over two years), the fairly didactic exploration of the UK political machine is leavened with more traditional elements of family drama. This is exemplified by the subplots showing Brand moving between his bitter wife and his mistress (the latter, distractingly named 'Alex Ferguson', is played by a usually naked Cherie Lunghi, who's just as convincing when clothed). These elements display an invigorating in-your-face grittiness and lack of adornment – from Brand swanning around at home in his blue Y-fronts to his girlfriend's unshaven armpits. The finest episodes, though – such as those depicting the party conference in Blackpool through the eyes of the media, or the committee stage of a new bill to increase the period of detention without trial in terrorist cases – tend to eschew the domestic sphere.

The are several fine supporting performances, most notably from Alan Badel in a role clearly modelled on Michael Foot, and Robert Hardy as a Catholic GP who refuses to approve abortions. But it is the taciturn and grave Shepherd, negotiating the corridors of power without losing sight of his ideals, who keeps the strands of Griffiths's enormously impressive undertaking on the rails. The series is available exclusively from www.networkdvd.net.

Discs: The transfer occasionally suffers from some unfortunate encoding problems but for the most part is perfectly adequate. (SA)

Bill Brand Trevor Griffiths's crusading look at Westminster realpolitik was ultra-topical in 1976, yet remains both instructive and compelling today

Hung – Season 2

Tennessee Wolf Pack/E1 Entertainment/HBO; US 2010; HBO Home Entertainment/Region 2; 282 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, deleted scenes, 'making of'

Programme: In times of political, social and economic turmoil, how should Joe Sixpack measure his manhood – philosophically, morally or in inches? It's a question that lies at the heart of this bittersweet dramedy, in which emotional peaks and troughs are depicted in terms of sexual tumescence first and economic deflationary pressure last. The show's opening titles, in the style of *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*, show lead character Ray Drecker (a glum-looking Thomas Jane) steadily stripping as he walks from downtown Detroit all the way home, finally jumping naked into the lake in front of his house.

Despite the women frequently being shown completely in the buff (this is HBO after all), there is a coyness about displaying Ray's *membrum virile* that strays into *Austin Powers* territory – which may seem strange, given that the show's ostensible hook is that our protagonist (insecure about his job, separated from his wife and kids and living in a tent after a serious fire) turns successfully to high-end prostitution thanks to his large penis. If the unseen jumbo appendage is the show's crass raison d'être, several episodes prove genuinely witty, especially a wry commentary on the Middle East conflict in which Ray's choice of houmous comes between two clients, one Arab and one Israeli.

In this second season, the tension between Ray's two pimps, the painfully insecure Tanya (Jane Adams) and the conniving and coldly manipulative Lenore (Rebecca Creskoff), turns increasingly sinister as Ray tries better to understand himself and his clients.

Discs: The brief 'making of' and the five audio commentaries rarely veer from uncritical backslapping, while the lengthiness of the deleted scenes suggests the show would benefit from a longer running time. Video and audio are impeccably presented. (SA)

Smile Jenny, You're Dead

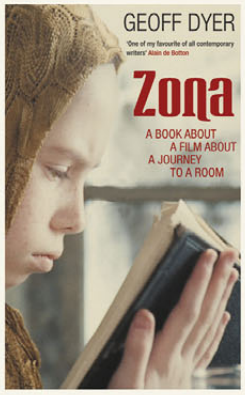
Warner Bros/ABC; US 1974; Warner Archive/Region 1; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

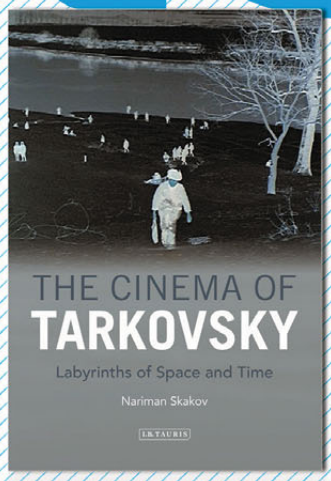
Programme: Writer Howard Rodman's unlikely inspiration for this TV movie's protagonist was Harry Greener, the aged ex-vaudevillian in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* who is reduced to peddling 'miracle solvent' silver polish door-to-door until he finally keels over and dies. That book's feeling for California's alienated and disenfranchised also comes through in the romantic and mytho-poetic undercurrent to this vehicle for David Janssen. He plays Harry Orwell, an ex-policeman invalided out of the force after being shot in the back. He lives on the beach making repairs (that will never be finished) to a sailboat called 'The Answer', and the story begins when one morning he finds a stray kid named Liberty (Jodie Foster) sleeping on its deck. He shoos her away but soon takes her in, while also trying to track down a psycho-killer played by Zalman King (in his days before becoming Hollywood's arch purveyor of glossy soft porn).

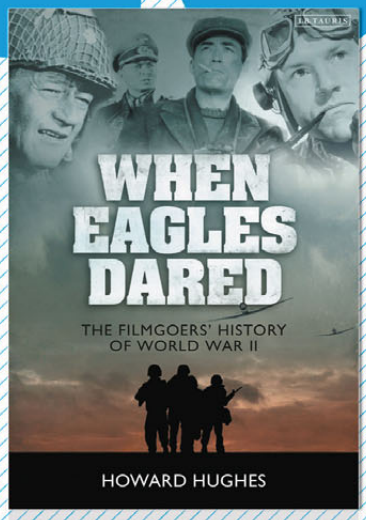
This tender and melancholic private-eye yarn ably sidesteps the clichés of the genre without sacrificing plot or character. It was the second attempt to launch a TV series and proved successful, although the subsequent show, *Harry O*, was cancelled after just two seasons.

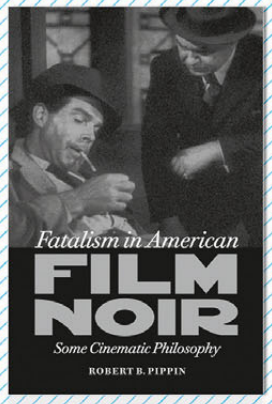
Disc: Part of the Warner On-Demand range, this transfer is a little dull but serviceable. There are no extras. (SA)

Read









Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room

By Geoff Dyer, Canongate Books, 240pp, hardback, £16.99, ISBN 9780857861665

In this spellbinding new book, the man described by *The Daily Telegraph* as "possibly the best living writer in Britain" takes on his biggest challenge yet: unlocking Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, the film that has obsessed him all his adult life.

Magnificently unpredictable and hilarious (and surely one of the most unusual books ever written about cinema), *Zona* takes the reader on an enthralling and thought-provoking journey. Like the film *Stalker* itself, it confronts the most mysterious and enduring questions of life and how to live.

www.canongate.co.uk

The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time

By Nariman Skakov, I.B. Tauris, 288pp, paperback, £17.99, ISBN 9781848856301

In this book Nariman Skakov explores the phenomenon of spatio-temporal lapse in Tarkovsky's cinema – from *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) to *Sacrifice* (1986). He argues that dreams, visions, mirages, memories, revelations, reveries and delusions are phenomena which present alternative spatio-temporal patterns; they disrupt the linear progression of events and create narrative discontinuity. Skakov opens and closes his original and fascinating book on Tarkovsky's cinema by focusing on the phenomenon of time that was discussed extensively by the filmmaker in his main theoretical treatise *Sculpting in Time*, as well as in a number of interviews and public lectures.

www.ibtauris.com

When Eagles Dared: The Filmgoers' History of World War II

By Howard Hughes, I.B. Tauris, 304pp, hardback, £19.50, ISBN 9781848856509

This unique book tells the story of both the historical events of World War II and the films that have depicted these events on cinema screens, comparing the cinematic myth with the historical reality as a guide to history through cinema.

Extensively illustrated with posters and stills, *When Eagles Dared* portrays the men and women who participated in World War II, from the evacuation of the Allied forces from France – as recreated in the film *Dunkirk* – through to the battle for Berlin and beyond. Each chapter discusses historical events as they unfolded and illustrates how these episodes have subsequently been portrayed by filmmakers on screen.

www.ibtauris.com

Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy

By Robert B. Pippin, University of Virginia Press, 152pp, hardback, $24.95, ISBN 9780813931890

The crime melodramas of the 1940s known now as *film noir* shared many formal and thematic elements, from unusual camera angles and lighting to moral ambiguity and femmes fatales. In this book Robert Pippin argues that many of these films also raise distinctly philosophical questions. Looking at several *film noirs* – including close readings of three classics of the genre, Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street*, Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* and Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* – Pippin reveals the ways in which these works explore the declining credibility of individuals as causal centres of agency, and how we live with the acknowledgment of such limitations.

www.upress.virginia.edu

Olympia

By Taylor Downing, Palgrave Macmillan/BFI Publishing, 128pp, illustrated, paperback, £10.99, ISBN 9781844574704

In this revised edition, historian and filmmaker Taylor Downing addresses Riefenstahl's filmmaking career before *Olympia* and her close relationship with Hitler, and considers newly available evidence on the background to the film's production. This proves conclusively that the film was directly commissioned by Hitler and funded through Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda and not, as Riefenstahl later claimed, commissioned independently from the Nazi state by the Olympic authorities. In writing this edition, Taylor Downing has been given access to a magnificent new restoration of the original version of the film by the International Olympic Committee.

www.palgrave.com/bfi

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Concentration zone

RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE (2)

The Writer and the Stalker: Anatoliy Solonitsyn and Aleksandr Kaydanovskiy in 'Stalker'

Nick James *enjoys the dance of narrative avoidance in Geoff Dyer's look into 'Stalker'*

Zona

By Geoff Dyer, Canongate, 231pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780857861665

Back in 2001, when W. G. Sebald's 'Austerlitz' was published, one of my fantasies for this magazine was that somehow new contributors would emerge who could write about film the way that Sebald wrote about life. That is, they would speak, as his narrators do, about a huge variety of fascinating adjunctal subjects while pursuing more standard film pretexts. Sebald's literary pretexts include a walk in Suffolk ('The Rings of Saturn'), a memoir of four acquaintances ('The Emigrants') and a collection of geographically overlapping travelogues ('Vertigo'). In our case the writers might start from a basic moving-image subject – a film, a TV drama, an actor's performance, an image, a sequence or a set visit – and, in the words of the artist Paul Klee, take a line for a walk. Sebald was a master of such literary slippage, of the near-invisible shifts of tone and register that allowed him to not so much digress as slip the reader out of the shed's back door and into the ballroom without them noticing how it was done.

Geoff Dyer does not fit the Sebald pattern. He has his own more striking persona as a cultural flaneur and worries away at a subject too much to act the ghostly nudger and leg-puller. But his methods of subject-harrying and digression work tangents and spin connections just as thrillingly, and in 'Zona' he shows how writing about film can deliver a sense of adventure. His book offers the satisfactions of a meditation that inhales a much larger world and filters out all the clichés of writing-about-film.

'Zona' carries the subheading "a book about a film about a journey to a room", and its subject is Andrei Tarkovsky's 'Stalker'. Here Dyer has bitten off a difficult chew. 'Stalker' is perhaps the ultimate in allusive, ambiguous, poetic quest movies, one whose interleaved hints of meaning litter its floor like the rich mulch of an ancient forest. The film begins in black and white in a very basic bar where the Professor and the Writer will meet the the Stalker, their guide to "The Zone", a much-prized, fenced-off, desolate land of concrete bunkers and burnt-out tank hulks that has mythic properties. In particular it contains "The Room", a place where, as Dyer has it, "your deepest wish will come true."

Dyer's mission is to bring to the reader the reverberations 'Stalker' set off in him over many viewings. As he tracks the film's quest he is very sensitive to what a hard sell this kind of film can be. Some of his earliest asides are about length of shot and the decline of concentration. He quotes Tarkovsky's Slow Cinema dictum that if you hold a shot way beyond the point at which it becomes boring, "a new quality emerges, a special intensity of attention"; he speculates that "soon people will not be able to watch films like... 'Ulysses' Gaze' or to read Henry James because they will not have the concentration to get from one interminable scene to the next." It's a great way to get the reader onside.

But Dyer's main tactic is story avoidance. The book is thickened with long, embedded footnotes that sometimes take up whole pages. In these he digresses on colour theory, the language of the gulags, the meaning of the Jeep, his personal life, references to Bresson and Ceylan's 'Uzak', thoughts on train stations, Chernobyl... Where Sebald slips and slides to tangential matters, Dyer's moves are more like pinball ricochets shot in slow motion.

'Stalker' is perhaps the ultimate in allusive, ambiguous, poetic quest movies

'Zona' is longer than most of the BFI Classics monographs (the books it most resembles), and takes a much more radical approach. Nonetheless, the pitfalls attendant to explicating a single film have not been entirely banished. Describing what happens moment by moment remains a chore (soon to be, one hopes, an unnecessary one as more opportunities to embed actual film footage into text present themselves). Dyer's evocations are mostly superb. He finds ingenious ways to sidestep the 'and then' of sequential events. You could say that his whole book is a dance of narrative avoidance, yet the very paradox of the film's hopeful bleakness, its suggestive but secretive landscape, makes it impossible to describe.

Like the BFI Classics books, 'Zona' relies on access to the film itself. This goes against Dyer's own experiences of 'Stalker'. He preferred "the way my visits to the zone were at the mercy of cinema schedules and festival programmes". But this reviewer may also have been spoiled for full enjoyment of the book's descriptions. In December last year I watched Dyer read a passage over the relevant clip. It was the best way to experience it, and one can see that the film distributor and book publisher need only get together to produce a wonderful 'Stalker' app in which the author could take on the film at his own pace, no doubt with all the tangential interludes that so enrich it here. **Nick James**

FURTHER READING

British Film Culture in the 1970s

Edited by Sue Harper and Justin Smith, Edinburgh University Press, 336pp, £65, ISBN 9780748640782

Back in the 1970s 'film culture', or 'minority' film culture, meant art movies, art cinemas, film societies, highbrow magazines, and the small but wonderful audience that sustained it all. Naturally there was overlap, but 'majority' film culture meant everything else: Hollywood-Pinewood and all that related them to their more numerous but equally splendid viewers. Defining terms may be tedious, but a book that aims to "draw a map of film culture" and speaks of the historian's "duty to attend to the whole film culture of a period, irrespective of quality" probably ought to devote a paragraph to the question.

The editors and principal authors of *British Film Culture in the 1970s* think otherwise, however; with a couple of exceptions, their book scarcely touches on film culture until its last chapter. For the most part it is a dutiful overview of British film production, drawn largely from secondary sources. Like a map, it has no story to tell or much of a thesis to advance, other than the near-tautology that the film business responds, unevenly, to market pressures, including the changing attitudes of its audiences. Thus the depot in *On the Buses* (1971) "becomes a contested site of work-shy antics and sexism, drawing on at least two of the contemporary concerns of the 1970s."

The general quality of argument and of expression is low, even by the standards of contemporary academic publishing. My favourite sentence begins: "The broaching of the incest taboo is unambiguously condemned..." The final chapter begins with the perplexing claim that "there is a dearth of evidence about popular film taste in the 1970s", but goes on to provide the rudiments of what might have been a fascinating study of 'majority' film culture in Portsmouth and Southampton, if handled well. Meanwhile readers of *Sight & Sound* emerge as the villains of the piece. They sought out European films because "they were harder to consume and often even harder to see, and thus conferred kudos on those who saw them." Well, quite, but a £65 book committed to "popular pleasures" needs to provide a few of its own. **Henry K. Miller**

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

"Contested site": 'On the Buses'

The Anatomy of Harpo Marx

By Wayne Koestenbaum, Unversity of California Press, 336pp, £20.95, ISBN 9780520269019

"What is the *matter* with you?" So says the long-suffering Margaret Dumont in *Animal Crackers* (1930) when, not for the first time, she finds that Harpo's thigh is in her left hand. The more pressing question, even after many viewings, is how the thing got there: one moment you're a well-apportioned dowager trying to rise above Groucho's leery, limbo-dancing wit, the next you're being treated like the furniture by a curiously muscular child-loon in a ginger wig. The "leg trick", as Wayne Koestenbaum calls it in his charming and rigorous study, is one of Harpo's more speedy, surreptitious turns; it seems to come from nowhere, its comedic mechanics skilfully elided till audience and onscreen dupe realise he's done it. Again.

On the face of it, speed was his thing: the theatrical roots of Harpo and his brothers may have been obvious in the films, but his dumb kinetics seem to spin off the centrifuge of silent comedy's energy. As Koestenbaum puts it: "Who knows what Harpo wants? We only see evidence of his momentum." But just as the best of early cinematic slapstick is actually all about slowness, so Harpo's velocity tends to a paradoxical stasis, whether it's the blankness of repetition (all those circular chase scenes) or, more engagingly, oases of intense concentration in the midst of chaos.

Time and again, says Koestenbaum, Harpo's face is "waxen with stopped thought". Never mind such privileged moments as the Harpo-Groucho mirror scene in *Duck Soup* (1933) – whether scissoring off every necktie in sight or fingering his weird arsenal of car horns and other improbable props (was a comic character ever so physically encumbered and transfixed by things?), the whole texture of Harpo's performance has to do with intense absorption.

KOBAL COLLECTION (↓)

He did it again: Harpo Marx does the 'leg trick' in 'Animal Crackers'

What better subject, then, for a critical study that is practically all concentration or interpretation, and almost nothing in terms of dutiful biography, film history or theoretical armature? Or so *The Anatomy of Harpo Marx* presents itself, at least. Koestenbaum is in truth too smart a critic (author of books on humiliation, opera, Warhol and Jackie Kennedy; also an acclaimed poet) not to be aware of the scholarship he apparently brackets in favour of a rapt, ecstatic and frequently hilarious adherence to Harpo's onscreen presence itself.

His *Anatomy* treats all of Harpo's appearances, one film at a time but with no respect for the chronology of their production. Here, then, are actor and character reduced (or expanded) to a frieze of gestures, tricks and contemplative interludes: Harpo proffers a punning succession of objects in answer to Chico's request for a flashlight; Harpo shoots the hats off young ladies' heads; Harpo leaps into the arms of various women; Harpo leaps into the arms of various men.

"Harpo loses himself in the practice of being Harpo, and I lose myself in contemplating Harpo." As a critical method, Koestenbaum acknowledges, this "might be madness". At one level, it allows him to engage some staples of comic theory: repetition, duration, literalism, a laconic refusal of all types of authority. But the essence of Harpo is a mode of acceleration or escalation (even if it's in the direction of entropy or emptiness), and Koestenbaum is unafraid of seeming to have too much invested in Harpo's cute, saintly, buffed and often bare body.

It's no shock to be told that a lot of comic stage or screen business seems to be about castration, but it is a surprise to read that the critic "think[s] of Harpo's harp solos while watching a solo porn video of a guy named Dave", or that Harpo's blank stare reminds him of those who had lost all hope in the Nazi death camps. But the point – or one point – of Koestenbaum's experiment is to test the limits of what we find critically embarrassing: "We commit a cruelty against existence if we do not interpret it to death." **Brian Dillon**

The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker

By Timothy Corrigan, Oxford University Press USA, 256pp, £17.99, ISBN 9780199781706

An essay, according to Aldous Huxley, is a "literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything". Or perhaps that should be *trying* to say almost everything about almost anything; after all, the word needn't refer to a product, but to an attempt. In recent years, growing numbers of filmmakers – especially in the gallery circuit, where it's more acceptable to emphasise the process-driven aspects of your work than it is in the world of arthouse cinema – have taken to describing their moving-image works as 'essay films' or 'cine-essays'.

But what are they? For Timothy Corrigan, the difficulty of describing them is part of their appeal. If most documentaries are content-driven and easily reducible to a synopsis, he admires essay films for being vagrant beasts that drift between reportage, confession, experimentalism and fabulation. Yet for all the essayisms to be found in Eisenstein or in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Corrigan claims that that the essay film only truly emerged during World War II.

A key text is Hans Richter's 'The Film Essay' (1940), which spoke of the need for documentaries driven by a desire "to find a representation for intellectual content" more than "beautiful vistas". However, more important than any theoretical axiom were the social and political convulsions of the period: Nazi death camps, to say nothing of the imminent toppling of imperial rule in many colonised nations, meant that "failure, crisis and trauma often became the experiential base of the essayist".

The book's second section is devoted to a breakdown of the different forms that the essay film may take. These include quasi-biographical works such as Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) and Errol Morris's *Mr. Death* (1999), which are less interested in the details of their subjects' lives than they are in exploring the many ways in which those lives might be interpreted; 'excursion' works such as Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1976) and Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Space* (1997), in which the traveller "tends to come undone or collapse and is no longer capable of mapping the world as physical, semantic, or psychological dwelling"; diaristic films like Jonas Mekas's *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1976) and Nanni Moretti's *Dear Diary* (1993), which emphasise "the violence of time and the timing of violence".

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (↓)

Essay excursion: 'Robinson in Space'

The editorial essay – which could include Davis Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) but is more fully examined through Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) and Lynne Sachs's *States of Belonging* (2006) – is described as a film that deals with social events and institutions less in terms of what is known about them than in terms of how they come to be known by society. Finally, Corrigan identifies what he calls "refractive cinema": films such as Raúl Ruiz's *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (1978) and Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth's *The Five Obstructions* (2003) that offer creative commentaries on other films, in so doing opening up an "abstracted zone for thinking through the very terms of cinematic thinking".

Corrigan is a pleasingly unashamed enthusiast for the essay film, and his book will be a valuable primer for newcomers to the field – though I was surprised by the omission of any discussion of the rich body of work produced by the Black Audio Film Collective. A less evangelical book might have speculated about whether there's a relationship between the essay film and what Christopher Lasch called "the culture of narcissism". Too many cine-essays I see these days are fuzzy, unfocused exercises in lazy journalism and whimsical navel-gazing, or half-hearted instances of what Derrida called "archive fever". The radicalism of essay films – like that of any documentary – has to be demonstrated, not just taken as a given. **Sukhdev Sandhu**

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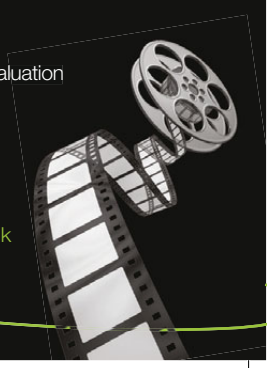

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In search of Gilbert

It seems when I wrote my tribute to my friend Gilbert Adair (*S&S*, February), I was taken in by a degree of self-mythologisation on his part. His brothers have now confirmed that he was in fact born in Kilmarnock in East Ayrshire, and attended Glasgow University. Gilbert certainly told me and others about seeing films in Edinburgh, but that is as far as it went. Furthermore, his residence in Paris in the 1970s was not as permanent as he often suggested, since I now hear he was to be found frequently in London. Still, I am sure he would have been more than content that we had gone along with 'printing the legend'.

David Thompson
London

Various Artists

"It's an obviously outré one-off project, but cuddly enough to be a crowd-pleaser, conquering much the same mid-market audience that fell for Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001). The appeal of stories about cute young women doggedly in love with 'difficult' men is clearly constant." (Reviews, *S&S*, January)

Is going to 'the movies' to enjoy yourself an act of self-deception that has to be deplored? Thank goodness I sit squarely in the middle of that same "mid-market audience" who, in my opinion, are ill served by your critic Tony Rayns's pompous and sneering review of *The Artist*.

The Artist is not, nor was it intended to be, an intellectual film to be probed and dissected. Yes, of course, it has flaws, but it is what it is: a relaxing, charming, fun night at the pictures – one man's loving tribute to silent-era Hollywood. On the night I was at a packed Queen's Film Theatre in Belfast, the audience applauded at the end. There are plenty of other films and other nights for deep meaningful reflection and discussion.

And to compare it to the charmless Benny Hill single 'Ernie, the Fastest Milkman in the West', Mr Rayns, is just plain silly.

William Graham
Co. Down, Northern Ireland

Language gap: 'The Artist'

Was I the only one whose jaw dropped at the ending of *The Artist* when George Valentin spoke his two only words and we realised for the first time: Oh my God – he's *foreign*! Was this the entire point of the otherwise crushingly twee movie, making it much more subversive than it first appears? The whole reason George resists the talkies, of course, is that he is afraid of being found out – as a *foreigner*. Is this, then, a portrait of American insularity, if not downright xenophobia?

Perhaps when audiences applaud the film, they might consider that it is about language – the thing that most hampers modern international cinema. No French movie would be a hit in the USA unless it *was* silent. Furthermore, no British movie can be a hit unless it is moulded to fit American sensibilities (or so producers tell us). So maybe the 'feelgood' ending of *The Artist* is nothing but an act of enormous sarcasm about the future of cinema yet to come. Anyway, it's telling that at the end, when George speaks, he speaks not in his native tongue but in English. Or rather, American.

Stephen Volk
Bradford-on-Avon

For eternity

Regarding David Jenkins's reference ('The Sweep of History', *S&S*, February) to my 2006 review of Theo Angelopoulos's *Eternity and a Day*, I would just like to clarify that my evocation of Thomas Pynchon as an avatar to Angelopoulos's global marginality was in no way meant to dub either figure as "unrelishable", but merely as too big and brilliant for the marketplace. I relish both without reservation.

Michael Atkinson
By email

In defence of distributors

I am astounded that *Sight & Sound* thought fit to publish Mr Roddick's column 'A slice of life' (Mr Busy, *S&S*, January). Frankly it's more of a sliver, and here's why:

A take of £160K at UK box office is not that easy to reach with an independent film. I looked at four previous *Sight & Sound* 'Films of the Month' at random, and only one of them reached a total above it. (The lowest total was a mere £5,552.) But let's stick with £160K: in Mr Roddick's model there appears to be no VAT paid, which is unique. If VAT was paid, then it would leave around £133,300, of which the average 30 per cent back to the distributor is just shy of £40,000. Also uniquely in this fantasy model, there appear to be no release costs.

So not only have the fundamental costs incurred been ignored (production of a DCP or, more rarely, a 35mm print; delivering the film to the cinemas; BBFC certification etc), but how is anyone supposed to know about the film without the basics: a trailer, a poster, a screening for press or exhibitors? 'John' (the producer Roddick quotes) commends the exposure his film received, but that does come with a publicity cost.

Even if you pretend that all the marketing is grass-roots (a term familiar to many an independent distributor), and that the release budget is a conservative 10 per cent of the production budget, then you minus another £16K from the £40K income, and typically split the remainder 50/50 between the distributor and producer – giving them £12K each.

Suddenly it's even less peachy. Considering that work on a film's release starts a minimum 12 weeks before the release, and that the film will be 'on tour' for 12 weeks, there is a six-month job of booking cinemas, servicing with materials and sustained publicity. Distributors are many things: talent spotters, campaign curators and audience developers; most crucially they are financiers, because to release a film, you have to cash-flow the release.

Well done to 'John' for getting his film released – it's a shame he didn't recoup more. However, as is shown by the news of the recent absorption of Icon – the distribution arm behind such titles as *A Single Man*, *Precious* and *Drive* – by Lionsgate, distribution is a tough business. Hold it up to scrutiny, by all means, but get the figures right.

Kate Gerova
Head of distribution, Soda Pictures

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Pride of Finland

The belated recognition of that crazy genius Teuvo Tulio (right) in a major international film magazine (Rushes, *S&S*, January) raises the question why there is so little contact between Finnish film experts and the rest of the world. No other national cinema is as well documented by its local historians; not even the admirable Mexican and Swedish anthologies are as richly detailed as the 12-part Finnish book series available in Western libraries. Yet the films' export has always been minimal, as is the exchange of other information.

I happened to be in Finland in July 1995 when Aki Kaurismäki regular Matti Pellonpää died. It was top news on local television, but it took weeks, if not months, to get reported in the Western media. Finland never lacked major film talent – what it lacks is a cultural ambassador in the West. I hope that, in Peter von Bagh, it has finally found one.

Frank Noack
Berlin, Germany

Additions & corrections

February p.60 *Acts of Godfrey*, Cert 15 84m 45s, 7,627 ft +8 frames; p.64 *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Cert 18, 157m 55s, 14,212 ft +8 frames; p.65 *Haywire*, Cert 15, 92m 41s, 8,341 ft +8 frames; p.66 *House of Tolerance*, Cert 18, 125m 38s, 11,306 ft +8 frames; p.70 *The Lady*, Cert 12A, 132m 6s, 11,889 ft +0 frames; p.73 *Margin Call*, Cert 15, 106m 26s, 9,579 ft +0 frames; p.73 *Mission Impossible Ghost Protocol*, Cert 12A, 133m 0s, 11,970 ft +0 frames; p.75 *The Nine Muses*, Cert PG, 96m 14s, 8,660 ft +9 frames; p.76 *Patience (After Sebald)*, Cert 12A, 86m 21s, 7,771 ft +8 frames; p.80 *A Useful Life*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video cert U, 63m 17s

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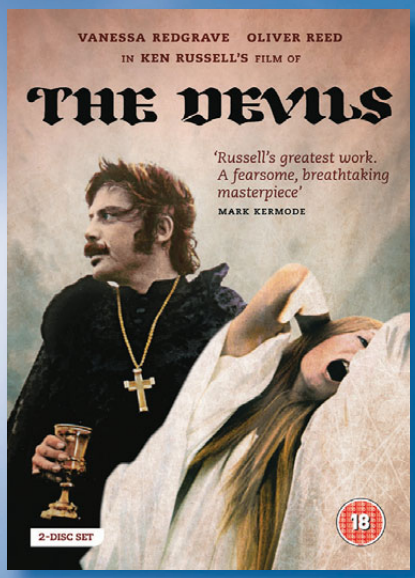

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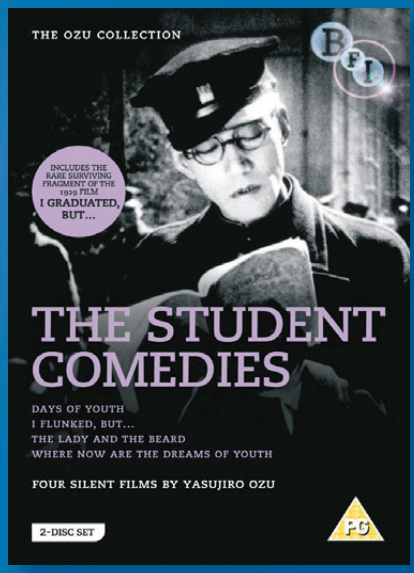

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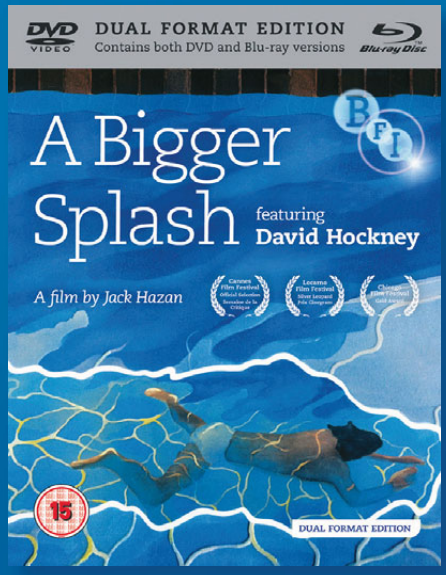

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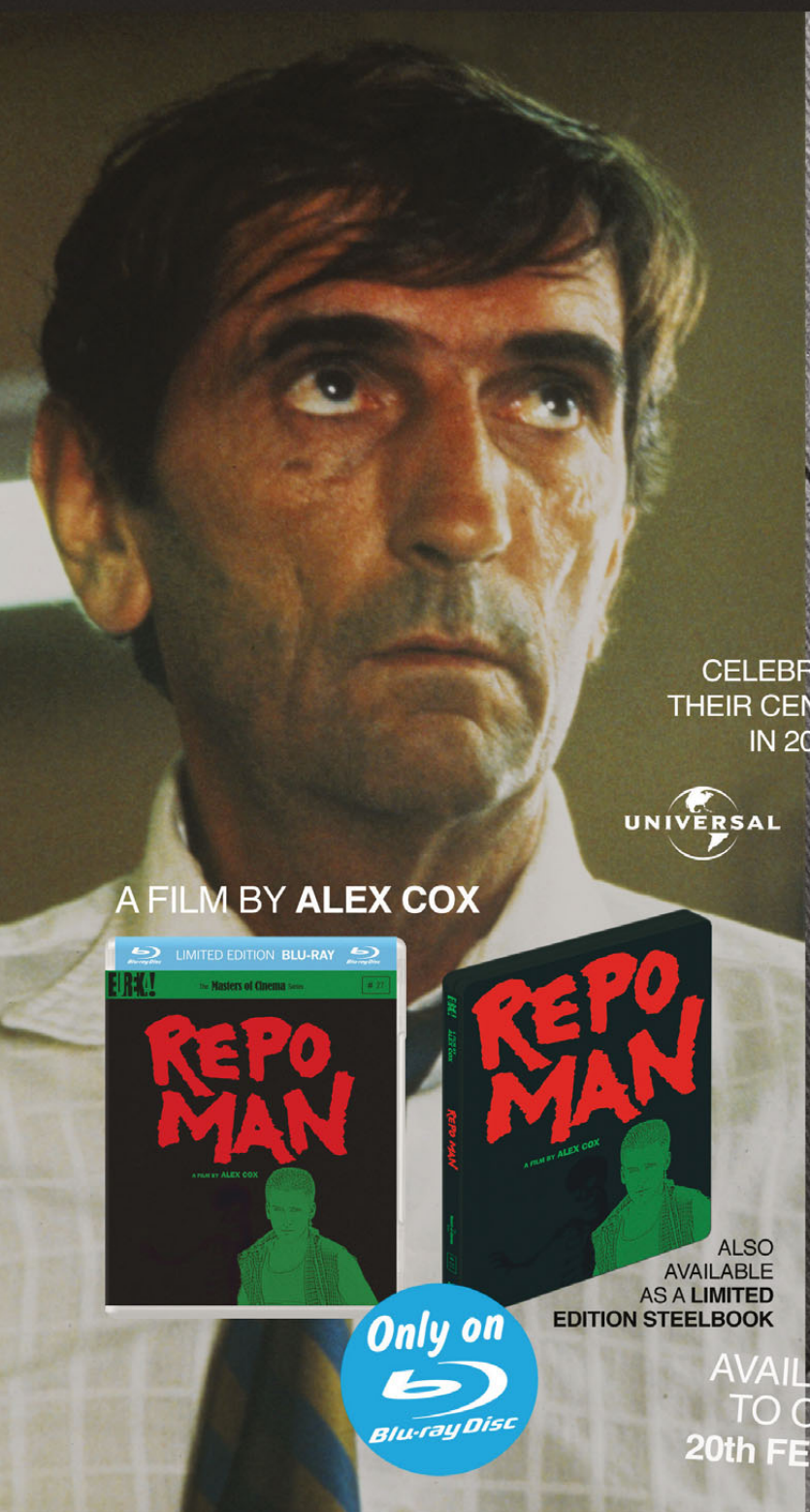

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